

Routledge Studies in Media, Communication, and Politics

COMMUNICATING POPULISM

**COMPARING ACTOR PERCEPTIONS, MEDIA COVERAGE,
AND EFFECTS ON CITIZENS IN EUROPE**

Edited by

Carsten Reinemann, James Stanyer, Toril Aalberg,
Frank Esser, and Claes H. de Vreese



This volume brings together leading scholars on populist political communication and truly demonstrates the relevance for populism as a research area within political communication research. The book provides a substantial leap forward in our empirical and theoretical understanding of populist political communication through comparative empirical evidence on its consequences. Rarely does a volume present such rich and original comparative empirical evidence. This volume should be on the shelf of any scholar interested in populism and political communication, as it lays the foundation for future studies within this emerging research field.

—**Erik Knudsen**, *Department of Information Science
and Media Studies, University of Bergen*

The book addresses crucial questions about how populist messages are perceived by politicians and journalists and what effect they might have on target audiences. It is a must-read for everyone interested in studying populism.

—**Otto Eibl**, *Department of Political Science,
Masaryk University*

If populism often (but not always) goes along with nationalism and the rejection of expertise, this is a decidedly non-populist book: based on the international collaboration of experts from all over Europe and on elaborate comparative empirical research. And it is ‘populist’ in the best sense: accessible and enlightening also to the uninitiated (while essential to everyone in the field), and with a bit of critical advice to journalistic and political elites.

—**Benjamin Krämer**, *Department of Communication
Science and Media Research, LMU Munich*



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Communicating Populism

The studies in this volume conceptualize populism as a type of political communication and investigate it comparatively, focusing on (1) politicians' and journalists' perceptions; (2) media coverage; and (3) effects on citizens.

This book presents findings from several large-scale internationally comparative empirical studies, funded by the European Cooperation in the field of Scientific and Technical Research (COST), focusing on communication and the media within the context of populism and populist political communication in Europe. The studies are based on comparative interview studies with journalists and politicians, a large-scale comparative content analysis, and a comparative cross-country experiment using nationally representative online surveys over 15 countries. The book also includes advice for stakeholders like politicians, the media, and citizens about how to deal with the challenge of populist political communication.

This enlightening volume is 'populist' in the best sense and will be an essential text for any scholar in political science, communication science, media studies, sociology, and philosophy with an interest in populism and political communication. It does not assume specialist knowledge and will remain accessible and engaging to students, practitioners, and policymakers.

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Communicating Populism

Comparing Actor Perceptions, Media Coverage, and Effects on Citizens
in Europe

*Edited by Carsten Reinemann, James Stanyer, Toril Aalberg, Frank
Esser, and Claes H. de Vreese*

Communicating Populism

Comparing Actor Perceptions,
Media Coverage, and Effects
on Citizens in Europe

Edited by Carsten Reinemann,
James Stanyer, Toril Aalberg,
Frank Esser, and Claes H. de Vreese



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1 Introduction

Comprehending and Investigating Populist Communication From a Comparative Perspective

*Carsten Reinemann, James Stanyer,
Toril Aalberg, Frank Esser, and
Claes H. de Vreese*

Introduction

Who would have believed in the first years of the 21st century that so many democracies across the globe would be put under such enormous pressure by populist movements, parties, and politicians; that the principles of liberal democracy such as the separation of powers, the rule of law, the freedom of the press, and minority rights, would come under such intense attack; that the term ‘political elite’ would have pejorative connotations for so many citizens; or that ethno-nationalist rhetoric would become such a common feature of public discourse? However, as populist parties and politicians have assumed power across Europe and beyond, there has been growing uncertainty, and some disagreement, about whether populism poses an existential threat to the very foundations of liberal democracy and its values, or whether it is refreshing representative democratic politics often characterized by declining political participation and disillusionment (e.g., Abts & Rummens, 2007; Canovan, 1999; Kriesi, 2014; Mudde, 2004; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017; Taggart, 2004). This volume seeks to contribute to current efforts from various social sciences that attempt to explain the circumstances and mechanisms that contribute to the success or failure of populism and populist communication in different countries, among different segments of the population, and in different types of media. It is guided by two major premises.

First, the authors in this collection begin with the assumption that populism can only be fully understood if the role played by communication and the media is taken seriously. Therefore, building upon prior work (e.g., Mazzoleni, 2008; Moffitt, 2016; Moffitt & Tormey, 2014), it conceptualizes populism as a type of political communication that is characterized by specific, unique message elements and their

combination (e.g., Reinemann, Aalberg, Esser, Strömbäck, & de Vreese, 2017; de Vreese, Esser, Aalberg, Reinemann, & Stanyer, 2018). Several recent publications have pointed out that despite the huge importance of, and changes in, the media environment, many analyses of populism have demonstrated a blind spot when it comes to the media and communicative processes (e.g., Aalberg, Esser, Reinemann, Strömbäck, & de Vreese, 2017; de Vreese et al., 2018). This has begun to change recently with publications focusing on, for example, online activities of populist actors (e.g., Engesser, Fawzi, & Larsson, 2017; Krämer, 2017; Zulianello, Albertini, & Ceccobelli, 2018), media coverage of populism (e.g., Wettstein, Esser, Schulz, Wirz, & Wirth, 2018b), and the effects of populist elements of communication upon citizens (e.g., Müller et al., 2017; Hameleers et al., 2018; Wirz et al., 2018). However, there remain a lot of unanswered questions. With this volume, we seek to further contribute to this recently increasing interest in the communicative and media-related aspects of populism.

Second, the authors in this volume argue that our understanding of populism can hugely benefit from systematic comparisons of various national contexts, various groups of actors or organizations, and different types of media. Although the surge of populism may sometimes appear to be an almost uniform trend across countries, a closer look reveals that there are differences, for example, with respect to the historical development of populist parties and their electoral outcomes. These differences require explanation and, at the same time, constitute the invaluable variance that will enable us to identify the situational and structural factors that contribute to the rise and fall of populism. Again, such comparative studies of populist communication have long been scarce. Only recently, scholars have made considerable progress in this respect by applying internationally comparative designs to investigate the rhetoric of populists (e.g., Ernst, Engesser, Büchel, Blassnig, & Esser, 2017; Zulianello et al., 2018), media coverage of populism (e.g., Wettstein et al., 2018a), citizen engagement with populist communication (e.g., Bobba, Cremonesi, Mancosu, & Seddone, 2018), and effects of populist communication (e.g., Müller et al., 2017; Hameleers et al., 2018). Ideally, such comparisons take into account the multi-level structure of factors influencing the senders, mediators, and receivers of populist communication by including, for example, contextual information regarding country characteristics such as unemployment rates or migration figures into their analysis (e.g., Hameleers et al., 2018), but this also poses considerable conceptual and methodological challenges. The empirical chapters in this volume also contribute to the comparative perspective on populist communication by using systematically comparative designs, although they do not all apply multi-level approaches.

Populist Political Communication as a Multi-Dimensional and Gradual Phenomenon

As presented elsewhere (Aalberg et al., 2017; de Vreese et al., 2018), the authors of this volume argue that communicative processes are crucial to understanding populism. Despite ongoing disputes about the concept, there is a growing consensus that looking at populism from a communication and media perspective offers unique and important insights into the functioning of populism, especially in times of a rapidly changing high-choice media environment that may have altered the very foundations of contemporary populist success (Van Aelst et al., 2017; de Vreese et al., 2018).

In addition, scholars seem to agree that references to the communicative construction of, and a focus on, ‘a homogenous people’ can be regarded as a key component of populist ideology and mindset (‘people-centrism’, ‘heartland framing’) (e.g., Canovan, 1999; Mudde, 2004; Taggart, 2004). This means that the primary defining feature of populism is the construction of an in-group of ‘the people’ or appealing to citizens’ identity as part of ‘the people’. However, since ‘the people’ is a vague term, it comes with different connotations and thus different meanings (e.g., the people as sovereign, class, ethnic group, nation, ordinary people) (e.g., Mény & Surel, 2002; also Laclau, 2005). These meanings can either be explicitly expressed in populist messages, or be more implicit. In that case, the connotations of terms such as ‘we’ or ‘the people’ must be recognized and reconstructed by audiences in the process of reception (see de Vreese et al., 2018; Reinemann et al., 2017). Other authors, also included in this volume, hold the view that a focus on restoring popular sovereignty, vis-à-vis the elites, constitutes another element that can be distinguished from both people-centrism and anti-elitism (i.e., the chapters by Blassnig et al., Maurer et al., and Esser et al.). Although such a focus on ‘the people’ may seem unproblematic and almost natural in democracies, populism is considered a threat to democracy by many scholars, politicians, and journalists because of its illiberal and authoritarian overtones. Many of its representatives tend to support a pure rule of the ‘real’ majoritarianism, oppose intermediaries such as the media and open political discourse, and show preference for ethnic and cultural homogeneity (e.g., Abts & Rummens, 2007).

The core element, ‘people-centrism’, is usually combined with other ideological or message elements, most importantly anti-elitism and anti-outgroup stances (see Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). Political elites and horizontal or vertical out-groups (‘them’; e.g., immigrants, ethnic minorities, the wealthy) can be regarded as functional equivalents in that they represent the standard to which ‘the people’ (‘we’) are compared and contrasted with. Such a focus on intergroup differences can, on the

one hand, strengthen identification with the in-group, foster in-group favoritism, and contribute to self-enhancement and the reduction of self-uncertainty. On the other hand, it can give rise to notions of out-group homogeneity, negative stereotypes of out-groups, negative intergroup emotions, and scapegoating. By this, populism delivers a problematic answer to the ever-present problem of social cohesion that mass democracies are constantly confronted with and that becomes especially pressing in times of crisis when people look for quick and easy solutions and actors or groups they can hold accountable (e.g., Reinemann et al., 2017; Hameleers et al., 2018; and the theory chapter by Hameleers et al. in this volume).

It is apparent from the above that we consider populist political communication to be a multi-dimensional phenomenon that can present itself in many different shapes and forms. These forms are defined by the combination of different elements of populism, resulting in different types of, for example, left-wing, right-wing, or empty populism (e.g., Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). In addition, we regard populism as a phenomenon that can be more or less pronounced in the ideology and messaging of actors. This means that actors, parties, citizens, or media can score higher or lower on a populism scale depending on the importance of populist positions in their ideology or mindset or the frequency with which they spread populist message elements.

The Rise of Populism—Causes and Missing Links

Generally speaking, populist parties have gained traction in recent decades. In Europe, this process started in the 1980s, but has been particularly pronounced since the beginning of the new millennium and has further accelerated since 2012 (see Heinö, 2017, also Inglehart & Norris, 2016). This development has long been almost exclusively the result of the rise of right-wing populism. Whereas the average vote share of right-wing populist parties in European national elections was about 1 percent in the 1980s, it reached almost 13 percent in 2017. In contrast, left-wing populist parties lost support between the 1980s and 2012 but have gained ground again since then with an average of approximately 6 percent of votes in European national elections in 2017 (see Heinö, 2017, also Inglehart & Norris, 2016). This means that, taken together, populist actors from both the left and the right have been more successful in recent European elections than ever before, holding almost one out of every fifth seat in European national parliaments. In contrast, extremist, openly anti-democratic parties hold just 1.6 percent of all national parliamentary seats (Heinö, 2017). Moreover, populist parties have entered national governments in a number of European countries, including Austria, Hungary, Poland, and Switzerland. Even in Germany, where populist and extremist parties had been relatively unsuccessful for historical reasons, a right-wing

populist party has entered the national parliament in the aftermath of the 2015 refugee crisis.

The reasons for the rise of populism seem to be complex. Generally, scholars distinguish between demand and supply-side factors that typically have to interact to enable populist actors to thrive (e.g., Guiso, Herrera, Morelli, & Sonno, 2017; van Kessel, 2013). Demand for populist politics among citizens is often considered to be triggered by rapid and far-reaching social change or situations of crisis that lead to feelings of anxiety and perceptions of deprivation and social injustice. Research particularly points towards *economic* and *cultural* developments that have in the past been successfully targeted, fueled, and instrumentalized by populists (e.g., Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Lucassen & Lubbers, 2012; van Hauwaert & van Kessel, 2018). On the one hand, economic or financial downfall and crisis can contribute to economic insecurity or suffering among the population who are then attracted to a ‘unified nativist’, protectionist, or isolationist response presented by populists as a solution to those problems (e.g., Becker, Fetzer, & Novy, 2016; Otjes, Ivaldi, Jupskas, & Mazzoleni, 2018). On the other hand, increasing social diversity brought about by migration and the emancipation of formerly underprivileged groups may trigger feelings of relative deprivation, fear of being disadvantaged and culturally side-lined, or even fear of becoming a victim of crime. More broadly, some authors suggest that globalization, which has brought about both economic insecurity *and* cultural threats, at least in some places, provides fertile ground for populism and redefines traditional political cleavages (Kübler & Kriesi, 2017; Rodrik, 2018).

What is often missing from such explanations of populism is the fact that macro-level circumstances *as such* cannot be perceived directly by citizens and that their interpretation is not self-evident. Instead, perceptions of real-world circumstances and their interpretations are significantly affected by messages from political actors and the media. In fact, numerous studies conclude that media and politicians considerably influence citizens’ perceptions of, for example, the state of the economy (e.g., Bisgaard & Slothuus, 2018; Lischka, 2015) or certain societal groups such as immigrants (e.g., Atwell Seate & Mastro, 2016). Moreover, varying media diets and information environments result in diverging views and even misperceptions among different sections of the population (e.g., Cacciatore et al., 2014). Therefore, it can be argued that citizens’ *information environment*, and the messages and interpretations of politics and the media, are a *missing link* that connects real-world circumstances and citizens’ perceptions. This information environment is often neglected in literature on the causes of populism, although it may be key to explaining its rise.

A similar observation can be made with respect to the supply-side factors. The fact that populist parties and politicians exist is not itself sufficient to explain their success or failure. Instead, these actors need to capitalize on the trends mentioned above, or even construct or exaggerate them,

for political gain. They need to make ‘the people’ and anti-elite or anti-outgroup stances key features of their messaging, and use various channels of communication to reach their target audiences in order to spread their version of reality, their political stances, and their attributions of responsibility. These channels can either be news media that pick up populist communication or channels of direct communication, most importantly, online and social media channels (e.g., Engesser, Ernst, Esser, & Büchel, 2016; Engesser et al., 2017; Groshek & Koc-Michalska, 2017).

In order to account for the role played by intermediaries such as politicians and the media, Reinemann et al. (2017) suggest a heuristic model for the analysis of populist communication and its effects. The model includes different levels of analysis and explicitly distinguishes between real-world circumstances (macro-level), their representation in public discourse (meso-level), and citizen perceptions (micro-levels). This allows for the possibility that real-world conditions, their representation in political and media messages, and their perception by citizens may diverge and thereby either help or hinder the success of populist actors. In addition, the model also takes into account the possibility that the media themselves not only act as mediators of populist messages via political actors (*populism through the media*), but that they act as populist actors in their own right using populist rhetoric (*populism by the media*). A recent study shows, for example, that journalists, especially in tabloid newspapers, often present themselves as the voice of the people, portraying the people in a positive light and making advocative statements on their behalf. The same journalists also demonstrate an anti-establishment bias, portraying political elites in a negative light and making conflictive statements toward them (Wettstein et al., 2018a) (Figure 1.1).

Populist Political Communication in Comparative Perspective

In addition to a focus on the often ‘missing part’ played by communication and the media, we argue here, and elsewhere, that our understanding of populism can benefit from a systematic comparative investigation. In Figure 1.1, this notion is represented by the long-term structural, and the more short-term situational, contextual factors on the macro-level of the model. One major argument for the importance of a comparative approach comes from the simple observation that, although populism seems to be a global phenomenon (Rovira Kaltwasser, Taggart, Espejo, & Ostiguy, 2017), the form, visibility, and success of populism varies considerably across nations. For example, whereas the governing populist parties in Hungary and Poland gained the support of more than half of the electorate in the last national elections, total vote shares of all populist parties are half that size or less in countries like Norway, the Netherlands, or the United Kingdom (e.g., Heinö, 2017).

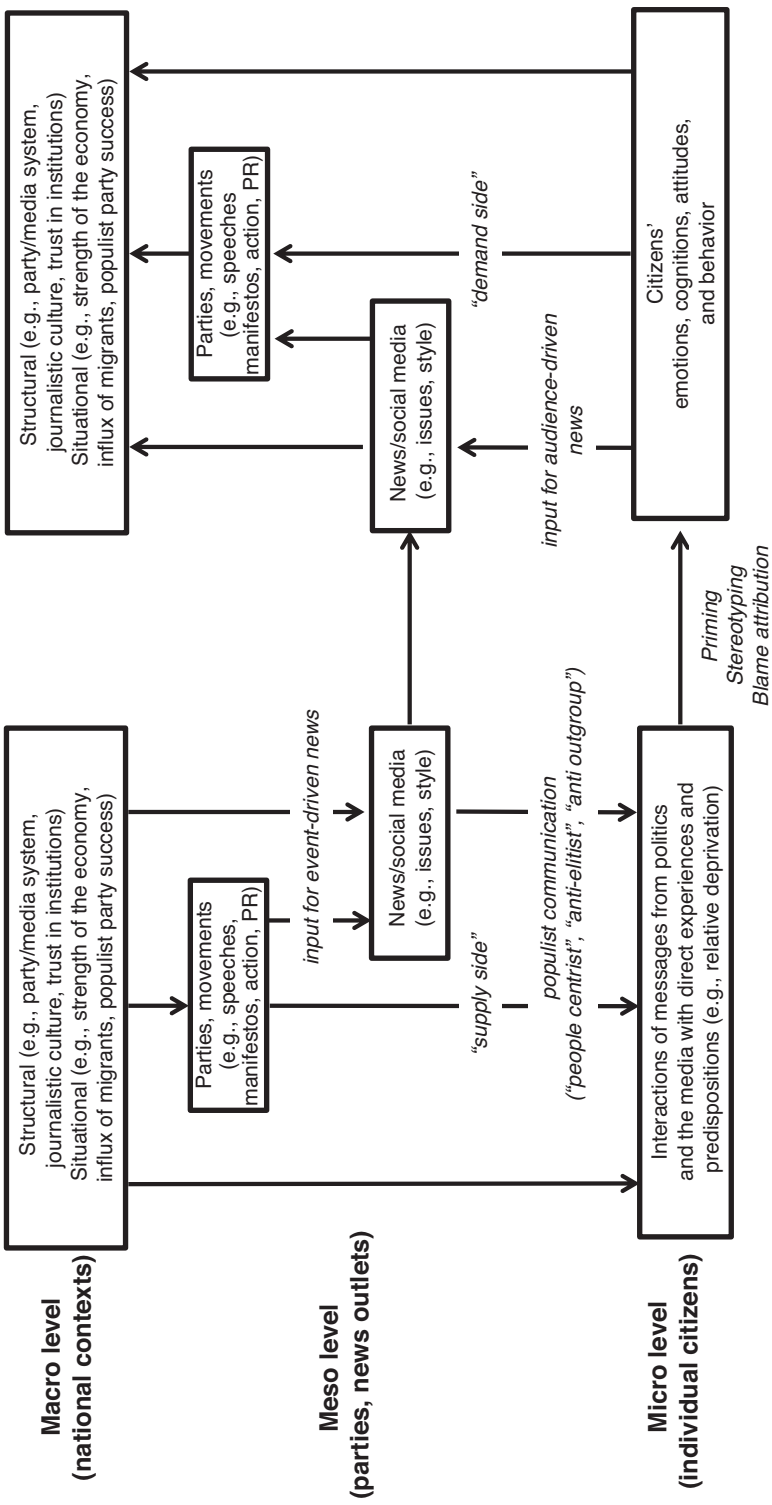


Figure 1.1 A model of populist political communication (based on Reinemann et al., 2017)

This points first of all to the relevance of contextual macro-level factors. Countries may be differently affected by negative economic or cultural developments such as financial or migration crises, providing different opportunity structures for populist messages. For example, a recent comparative study shows that the level of unemployment affects the mobilizing potential of populist messages (e.g., Hameleers et al., 2018). Second, countries may also diverge with respect to their political culture or the general level of trust in the political system and therefore provide a more or less fertile ground for populist appeals in times of crisis or crisis rhetoric. Third, these factors may also affect how political actors and the media on the meso-level engage in, or react to, populist messaging. For example, Wettstein et al. (2018a) point to differences between countries like Belgium or France, within which established parties built a *cordon sanitaire* around populist parties by excluding them from any form of coalition, and countries in which populists have been a part of government such as Austria, Greece, or Bulgaria. Obviously, the political exclusion of populist actors in countries with a *cordon sanitaire* also encouraged journalists to depart from standard norms of neutrality and contributed to a coverage in which populists were treated as marginal, laughable, or dangerous.

Overall, only a comparative analysis can reveal and explain similarities and differences in the communicative aspects of populism across countries. However, as several authors have noted, there is still a lack of comparative analyses of populist communication—even if an increasing number of such studies have been published recently (e.g., Hameleers et al., 2018; Wettstein et al., 2018b; Schulz, Wirth, & Müller, 2018; Zulianello et al., 2018). It is therefore still necessary to add to our understanding of populism by looking at it from a comparative perspective and to identify contextual (and individual-level) factors that might help to explain differences between countries. Only then will we achieve a more comprehensive understanding of today's populism.

The Genesis and Structure of This Volume

This volume answers the call for more communication-centered comparative research into the populism voiced in recent years (e.g., Aalberg et al., 2017; de Vreese et al., 2018). Whereas attitudes, voting behavior, or party platforms have long been addressed in comparative studies (e.g., Oesch, 2008; Pauwels, 2014; Rooduijn & Akkerman, 2017; Rooduijn, de Lange, & van der Brug, 2014), comparative approaches to populist political communication by politicians and parties (e.g., Ernst et al., 2017; Zulianello et al., 2018), the media (e.g., Wettstein et al., 2018a), and citizens (e.g., Müller et al., 2017; Hameleers et al., 2018; Wirz et al., 2018) have only recently become more frequent. This book seeks to add to these studies and contribute to answering several key questions regarding populist political communication. The book presents theories and

findings from four collaborative and internationally comparative empirical studies, focusing on (1) politicians' and journalists' perceptions of populist communication; (2) media coverage of populism; and (3) effects of populist messages on citizens. The studies are based on comparative interview studies with journalists (13 countries) and politicians (11 countries), a large-scale comparative content analysis (12 countries), and a comparative cross-country experiment using nationally representative online surveys (15 countries).

These studies were conducted in the context of a research network that was funded by the European Union framework program Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST). With the help of COST, scholars from 31 European countries and various academic fields were able to come together and discuss questions related to 'Populist Political Communication in Europe' over a four-year period from 2014 to 2018. The three working groups concentrated on the parts played by communicators in politics and the media, media coverage, and citizens. This working group structure was reflected in the literature studies conducted by the members of the network that were published in Aalberg et al. (2017) and that structure is also reflected in this book. Regarding the genesis of this book, it is also important to note that although the European funds provided within the COST framework can be used to cover networking and meeting costs, they cannot be used to finance actual research, i.e., COST does not provide any money for staff, coding, or surveys. This means that the funds for the research presented in this book came from various sources and the fact that not all countries are present in all studies is often the result of a lack of national funding opportunities to enable research within this network.

With reference to the selection of countries for the different studies, it is also important to note that besides theoretical considerations, the structure and purpose of the COST scheme and network had an impact upon which countries could be covered. The projects had to rely on the voluntary participation of country experts present in the network, and their time and money resources were usually limited to one project. Therefore, although it would have been preferable for them, the different studies do not cover the same countries. But, despite that, the relatively large number of countries per study ensures that countries with varying macro-level characteristics, for example, from different regions with different economic situations and a varying degree of populist success, are represented in all four individual studies. From the total of 22 countries represented, two countries were covered in all four studies (Greece and Italy), six countries in three of the studies, ten countries in two of the studies, and four in just one (Austria, Ireland, Sweden, and Turkey). Seven of the 22 countries are from Southern Europe, another seven from Eastern Europe, three from Northern Europe, and six from Western Europe (see Table 1.1).¹

Table 1.1 Countries represented in the studies by European region

	<i>Perceptions of politicians (11 countries)</i>	<i>Perceptions of journalists (13 countries)</i>	<i>Media coverage (12 countries)</i>	<i>Effects on citizens (15 countries)</i>
<i>Southern Europe</i>				
Greece	○	○	○	○
France	–	○	○	○
Israel	–	–	○	○
Italy	○	○	○	○
Portugal	○	○	–	–
Spain	○	○	–	○
Turkey	–	○	–	–
<i>Eastern Europe</i>				
Bosnia and Herzegovina	○	○	–	–
Bulgaria	○	○	○	–
Czech Republic	–	○	○	–
Hungary	○	○	–	–
Poland	○	–	○	○
Romania	○	○	–	○
Serbia	–	○	○	–
<i>Northern Europe</i>				
Denmark	○	○	–	–
Norway	○	–	○	○
Sweden	–	–	–	○
<i>Western Europe</i>				
Austria	–	–	–	○
Germany	–	–	○	○
Ireland	–	–	–	○
Netherlands	–	–	–	○
Switzerland	–	–	○	○
United Kingdom	–	–	○	○

Part I: Populism and Communicators presents the results of interviews with journalists and politicians about how they perceive populism and the part played by the media. The chapters in this part argue that it is necessary to our understanding of populist communication, to consider the perspective of the actors. First, Salgado and Stanyer reflect on the rationale and methodological approach of the two interview studies (Chapter 2), then Stanyer et al. (Chapter 3) describe the results of interviews with journalists in 13 countries, and Salgado et al. (Chapter 4) report on

interviews with journalists conducted in a slightly different set of another 11 countries.

Reflecting the focus on media and communication, *Part II: Populism in the Media* includes three chapters presenting the theory, methods, and findings from a comparative content analysis of media in 12 European countries. Blassnig et al. explain the rationale of the study, its methodological approach, and some basic findings (Chapter 5). Maurer et al. look for the effects of contextual factors on the representation of populist message elements in media coverage (Chapter 6), and Esser et al. take a longitudinal perspective and examine the development of populist elements in media coverage over a period of one year (Chapter 7).

Part III: Populism and Citizens comprises four chapters in which Hamelaers et al. present a theoretical model of the effects of populist messages on citizens (Chapter 8) as well as the methodological approach of a comparative experiment conducted in 15 countries (Chapter 9). Key results of this experiment are presented in the next two chapters, with Corbu et al. focusing on cognitive effects, such as blame attribution and stereotypes (Chapter 10), and Andreadis et al. concentrating on effects on attitudes and voting intentions (Chapter 11).

The book closes with a concluding chapter by de Vreese et al. (Chapter 12) that both summarizes key findings from the studies and offers advice on that basis to politicians, journalists, and citizens who are wondering how to deal with the challenges posed by populism.

Note

1. This regional classification is based on Aalberg et al. (2017) which mainly takes into account characteristics of the media system and media-politics relations. There are, of course, various ways to classify countries as belonging to different regions, depending on the criteria that are used. France, for example, is placed in the group of Southern European countries when it comes to its type of media system (e.g., Brüggemann, Engesser, Büchel, Humprecht, & Castro, 2014), while the United Nations geoscheme for Europe and EuroVoc (the publications office of the EU) place France in Western Europe.

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Part I

Populism and Communicators



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2 Perceptions of Populism and the Media

A Qualitative Comparative Approach to Studying the Views of Journalists and Politicians

Susana Salgado and James Stanyer

Introduction

This chapter provides background on the methodological approach adopted in the study on politicians' and journalists' perceptions of populism in the next two chapters of this collection. One of the two chapters presents and discusses politicians' perceptions (Salgado et al.) and the other, journalists' perceptions (Stanyer et al.). This research had several aims. The first was to understand populism from the perspective of politicians and journalists. Few, if any, studies have sought to try and understand the phenomenon from this standpoint. The second was to give voice to our data subjects, allowing them to express themselves in their own words, without constraint. And, third, was to determine the extent to which perceptions were shared (or not) across borders. Few, if any, studies have tried to understand this phenomenon in a comparative context.

Our approach aims to identify the most commonly held views on populism in countries in different European regions and to explore the reasons underpinning those views. This type of research agenda has potential to further illustrate the relationships between populism and media, and between populism and democracy. The present chapter outlines the main procedures adopted in our approach to studying perceptions of populism. Before concluding with a summary on our findings, the chapter explains the main outcomes of the research and provides contextual data for the study, as well as providing insight into reasons for the methodological design adopted by our research approach. It also examines some of the challenges faced by comparative studies in gathering and analyzing qualitative data.

Why Study Perceptions of Populism? And Why Include the Media?

The general purpose of our approach to studying perceptions of populism is broadly inspired by Blumer's (1986 [1969]) symbolic interactionism, which is based on three main premises: Actions towards things are heavily

influenced by the meaning of those things to the actors; meaning itself results from different types of social interactions; and meanings are construed and modified through interpretive processes. Furthermore, in our view, the media are deeply involved in all of these processes, especially when we consider complex phenomena such as populism. This line of reasoning substantiates the relevance of comparatively investigating perceptions of populism and what journalists and politicians—two groups which usually take on the role of leading public opinion—consider populism to be, and what are its causes and consequences.

Making sense of political information and events, in a similar way to political socialization more generally, is influenced by what we consider others to think. Additionally, research has pointed to the influential role of opinion leaders in opinion formation (e.g., the two-step flow of communication by Katz & Lazarsfeld, 2017 [1955] which draws attention to the influences of opinion leaders on citizens, and of media on both). Other influential media research has also empirically supported the impact the media have on perceptions and attitudes (e.g., Gerbner & Gross, 1976; McCombs & Shaw, 1993; Domke, Shah, & Wackman, 1998; Scheufele, 1999).

Contemporary political and media environments also suggest the centrality of both opinion-makers and the media in the formation of perceptions. For example, populist rhetoric itself implies the importance of the media: Some populist politicians openly criticize journalists and mainstream media and portray them as ‘enemies of the people’, while most populists try to bypass all kinds of representation, including that provided by the news media coverage of current events. A prime example is Viktor Orbán in Hungary. This also means that there are commonly intentional distortions of news and reality which result in misinformed beliefs that have potential to impact on the different actors’ perceptions of events.

Populism has been seen both as a negative and positive feature of democracy (see Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012, 2017; Aalberg, Esser, Reinemann, Strömbäck, & de Vreese, 2017; Salgado & Stavrakakis, 2018). It might be that this apparent contradiction is linked, not only to the different experiences countries have which is driven by the different types of populism they have first-hand experience of, but also to the discourse by and about populists that are produced and conveyed in the different types of media by opinion-makers in general, and in particular by politicians and mainstream journalists.

A study such as this also provides important subsidiary information about democracy, its quality, and the role of the media in democracy. By talking about populism, its causes and consequences, politicians and journalists are indirectly assessing the quality of democracy in their own countries and worldwide, and making inferences about the role of different types of media (e.g., news media coverage and social media) both

in democracy and in these phenomena. Establishing the most common views on populism and on populist actors also sets the tone for further understanding citizens' evaluations of the country's values, and signals the behaviors and attitudes that are expected of politicians, journalists, and citizens in general.

This relationship between opinion-makers' ideas and the overall political environment is largely assumed in research, but it has not been consistently and systematically examined and documented. Our research approach fits within this scope and is a first attempt to look at these issues systematically, but taking advantage of the added value of qualitative research regarding the richness and complexity of the data collected. Only a qualitative approach permits such a detailed study of these elements.

Why a Qualitative (Comparative) Approach to Studying Populism?

The main goal of this research project is to try to understand how actors in the media and politics make sense of the current 'populist zeitgeist'. There is a long tradition in communication and media studies, and in the social sciences more generally, of interpretivist research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). However, qualitative comparative analyses in this vein have been less common. Indeed, most spatially comparative research has paid less attention to questions of human understanding, preferring instead to focus on causality and empirically observable facts. This positivistic methodological approach has advantages (King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994), but it is not the only one and is not always the most suitable for addressing certain research questions (see Brady, Collier, & Seawright, 2010).

From existing quantitative research on populist political communication, we know an increasing amount about what populist politicians and parties say and what is said about them in the media and, from this, the views of such actors might be extrapolated, but as far as we know, few have gone beyond media texts and political manifestos to explore meaning making in relation to populism. So why do we need to examine journalists' and politicians' understanding of populism? And why comparatively? We do not know exactly what sense politicians and journalists in different countries make of the rise of populism. Is it, for example, connected to racism, nationalism, popular participation? What assumptions, associations, and prejudices are most commonly held? It is precisely these views that shape the production of political and media texts and are an important part of shaping public opinion and political attitudes. Politicians and journalists are considered important opinion-makers and have privileged access to media outlets, which allows them to spread their views and influence others. Knowing the substance of their opinions about important issues such as populism, and its causes and consequences, is therefore key to comprehending what is understood by populism in different places,

which type of discourse, arguments, and issues are usually associated with it, and what explains variations across countries.

We also wanted to give voice to our data subjects to allow them to express themselves in their own words, to explain what they understood about populism, and then to see the extent to which perceptions are shared (or not) across borders. That is, to try to understand meaning making in the context in which it happens, in particular, national political and media contexts. While there have been some attempts to explore the meaning making activity of data subjects, this tends not to be comparative. Therefore, we wanted to know the extent of shared perceptions across borders given the different contexts. Existing research provides a series of possible reasons for why perceptions might be different or similar between countries, and these reasons are discussed in the respective chapters on journalists' and politicians' perceptions.

Qualitative comparative research faces several hurdles, especially when involving more than two or three national contexts (Brady et al., 2010). However, having a team of scholars from 15 European countries, with knowledge of the political and media systems and cultures, presented a golden opportunity for a qualitative comparative analysis of understandings of populism. Beside the immediate linguistic advantages, such a team can provide an in-depth culturally nuanced insight that cannot be gained otherwise, and rarely by one or two scholars. It is only with this knowledge that qualitative comparative research can be carried out thoroughly and any reliable patterns identified.

It is important to note that from the outset the project was a collaborative exercise. The working group was committed to the principle of inclusive research. All members were given the opportunity to provide input into each stage of the research process and the discussions took place at key meetings organized by the COST Action, with further work conducted in the periods between meetings.

In sum, we believe that a qualitative comparative approach has the advantage of drawing on the substantive knowledge of researchers situated in the countries under examination. This allows a more culturally nuanced account of the journalists' and politicians' understanding of populism across countries.

Method

Since the focus of the project was to examine how politicians and journalists make sense of populism and its causes and consequences, it was important that the chosen research instruments allowed these two target groups to express their views and provide detailed responses to the questions. We could have used an instrument such as a closed survey with pre-defined responses (e.g., yes/no, or multiple-choice sets), but it was felt among working group members that this would limit the scope

for interviewees to be able to express themselves. It was deemed crucial to allow the interviewees to articulate their views and not be limited to box-ticking.

It is well documented that qualitative research interviews allow in-depth examination of views, although they do have well-acknowledged limitations (e.g., very context-specific data could elicit processes of ‘double hermeneutic’; for a synoptic account, see King & Horrocks, 2010). However, this choice needed to be offset against the need to be able to compare interview findings. The need to produce material that was directly comparable across countries, media outlets, and political parties meant that the interviewers needed to use the same questions and have the exact same guidelines regarding how questions should be posed, and additional information requested when needed. To overcome this tension, the working group used semi-structured qualitative research interviews. These enabled there to be a balance between, on the one hand, giving voice to the interviewee, and, on the other, providing a clear focus on a number of agreed topics. It also afforded interviewees the space to talk but provided material that was directly comparable.

Countries Included and Contextual Information

As noted earlier, we were interested in identifying discernible patterns across countries, type of media outlets and political parties, and between left and right on the political spectrum. In total, researchers from 13 countries took part in the study of journalists, and 11 countries in the study of politicians (see Table 2.1 below). This means that some countries only appeared in one of the studies. The country sample was self-selecting, determined by membership of the COST Action, and by interest in and ability to participate in the research being developed at the working group. The nature of all COST Actions means that as long as a country meets the qualifying criteria, researchers from that country can join the Action. The working group chairs ensured as much as possible that the country

Table 2.1 Country sample for the interview studies with journalists and politicians

<i>Country</i>	<i>Journalists</i>	<i>Politicians</i>
Eastern Europe	Bosnia and Herzegovina; Bulgaria; Czech Republic; Hungary; Romania; Serbia	Bosnia and Herzegovina; Bulgaria; Hungary; Poland; Romania
Northern Europe	Denmark	Denmark; Norway
Southern Europe	France; Greece; Italy; Portugal; Spain	Greece; Italy; Portugal; Spain
Western Europe		–
Other	Turkey	–

sample included countries that corresponded to all the different European regions (see Aalberg et al., 2017), but this could not be enforced, and some countries had to withdraw from the study due to lack of means to conduct the research (see also the introduction to this volume). There was ineluctable tension between what was desirable in theory and what was feasible in practice. In each country a minimum of four journalists and four politicians were interviewed. This followed a long discussion about the feasibility of adding additional interviewees vis-à-vis the value added to this with the possibility of introducing sample imbalance in the data analysis stages.

The politicians included in the study were required to be elected politicians in national or regional assemblies, or party leaders' representatives. The sample needed to include left and right or center political parties, and one populist party as defined by country chapters included in the edited volume by Aalberg et al. (2017), in which the different cases of populist actors in the several European countries were identified and discussed by the country chapters' authors. The selection of populist actors included in our study was thus based on the selection previously made by the participants in their country chapters which were published in the first COST Action edited book (Aalberg et al., 2017), namely on Bosnia (Džananović & Karamehić, 2017), the Czech Republic (Císař & Štětko, 2017), Denmark (Bächler & Hopmann, 2017), France (Hubé & Truan, 2017), Greece (Papathanassopoulos, Giannouli, & Andreadis, 2017), Hungary (Csigó & Merkovity, 2017), Italy (Bobba & Legnante, 2017), Norway (Jupskås, Ivarsflaten, Kalsnes, & Aalberg, 2017), Poland (Stępińska, Lipiński, Hess, & Piontek, 2017), Portugal (Salgado & Zúquete, 2017), Romania (Corbu, Balaban-Bălaș, & Negrea-Busuioc, 2017), and Spain (Sanders, Berganza, & de Miguel, 2017). Table 2.2 gives an overview of the parties from each country represented by our interviewees (approximately 50 politicians).

To be interviewed in our study, journalists had to be established and experienced professionals who report on politics and who work for a known media outlet, preferably with national or international reach. Where this was not possible, news media outlets with regional reach could also be included. The country teams were asked to include one journalist from a popular/tabloid media outlet that conformed to the above, whenever possible. Overall, more than 50 journalists were interviewed. An overview of the news media outlets they worked for can be found in Table 2.3.

In the event that country teams were unable to meet the criteria for selection, their countries were excluded from one or both studies. While in most countries access to interviewees was unproblematic, this was not always the case for both politicians and journalists. In some countries, despite repeated requests, it was impossible to achieve the quota of interviews and/or the minimum required balance in the sample within the given time frame and so these countries were excluded from the study.

Table 2.2 Political parties of the interviewed politicians

Country	Type of party		
	<i>Left and center-left parties</i>	<i>Right and center-right parties</i>	<i>Populist parties</i>
Bosnia	The Democratic Front	Serb Democratic Party; Party of Democratic Action (SDA)	SBB (Alliance for Better Future)
Bulgaria	Coalition Bulgarian Socialist Party for Bulgaria	Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (CEDB)	Ataka; Volya
Denmark	Social-Democrats; Alternativet	Venstre (Right-Liberal Party)	Danish People's Party
Greece	Potami	Nea Dimokratia (New Democracy)	Golden Dawn; Syriza
Hungary	LMP	(an independent MP)	Fidesz; Jobbik
Italy	Democratic Party	Forza Italia	Northern League; 5 Stars Movement
Norway	Socialist Left Party; Centre Party	Conservative Party	The Progress Party
Poland	Modern (Nowoczesna); Democratic Left Alliance (SLD)	Civic Platform (PO)	Law and Justice (PiS)
Portugal	Communist Party (PCP); Socialist Party (PS)	Social Democratic Party (PSD)	PNR (National Renewal Party)
Romania	PSD (The Social Democrat Party)	PNL (National Liberal Party); UDMR (The Democratic Union of the Hungarians from Romania)	USR (Union to Save Romania)
Spain	PSOE; Citizens (C's)	Popular Party (PP)	Podemos

Asking Questions

The interview guide covered the key questions to be asked by all researchers involved in the project (see section below for further details on the actual questions and their specific purpose). The questions were designed to be open and not leading. It was agreed the interviewers should not lead the interviewees' responses, but instead allow them to speak. Follow-up questions for clarification could be asked when necessary but it was important to allow the interviewees to respond without prompt and to freely speak their minds. With these strict procedures, we were trying to ensure that we were collecting responses to the actual questions posed and

Table 2.3 Media outlets of the interviewed journalists

<i>Country</i>	<i>Type of media outlet</i>	
	<i>Broadsheet/serious</i>	<i>Popular/tabloid media</i>
Bosnia	Numanović; Karup-Druško; Mavrak; TV Čubro	Daily Avaz
Bulgaria	Panorama Bulgarian National Television (BNT); media regulatory body; freelance journalist and political blogger	Gallery
Czech Republic	Czech Television; Týden (The Week); Respekt; Právo	–
Denmark	Politiken; Jyllands-Posten; TV2	Ekstra Bladet
France	Le Monde; slate.fr; www.lesjours.fr; freelance journalist	–
Greece	Kathimerini; Efimerida ton Syntakton; cnn.gr	Democratia
Hungary	Heti Világ Gazdaság (World Economy Weekly); TV2	888.hu; RTL Klub
Italy	Corriere della Sera, Il Giornale; Il Fatto Quotidiano	–
Portugal	Público; Expresso; Observador; SIC	Correio da Manhã
Romania	Adevarul; Sinteza; clujulcultural.ro	Romania TV
Serbia	Radio Television of Vojvodina; Deutsche Welle Radio; NIN	Blic
Spain	El Mundo; COPE; Libertaddigital.com; el diario.es	–
Turkey	Hurriyet; anonymous national newspaper x2; Gozlem (regional)	–

that we were gleaning the respondents' first impressions without inducing any bias via the interviewer.

The resort to prompts and probes during interviews was also considered and it was deemed that these interventions were important to ensure that the interviewees reflected on and addressed the questions asked (see King & Horrocks, 2010, for a discussion of the issues). This type of action by the interviewer was limited, though, to situations where the interviewee had not properly addressed a question or when further clarification was needed. Specific recommendations were made for interviewers to avoid leading the interviewees' answers and to intervene only in case the actual question had not been answered or when further clarification was deemed necessary.

Finally, it was decided that all interviews should either be conducted in person or over Skype call, and not by email or a social media medium

such as Facebook (see Opdenakker, 2006, for a discussion of the issues involved in this type of decision). In-person interviews were favored and encouraged, but in case these were not possible due to distance or the unavailability of respondents to meet in person, interviews were conducted through Skype.

Translation

There were 15 different countries included in the study, each with a different language. The challenges of translating qualitative interviews have been well documented elsewhere (Bogusia & Young, 2004). One of the main challenges of conducting qualitative comparative research in multiple languages is the issue of accurate translations that take account of cultural and linguistic differences. This challenge was amplified by a limited budget. While there was no money for professional translators, all working group members spoke English fluently in addition to their native language. The translations were thus conducted by members of the COST Action and of the working group. This had the added advantage that those who translated the interviews were the same people working on the research, ensuring that they were familiar with the project, its guidelines, and objectives (Bogusia & Young, 2004).

Each research question was also translated from English into the various native languages by participating researchers. Any queries with the original English questions were followed up with the project leaders. Any potential follow-up questions not included in the interview guide, but deemed necessary to clarify the respondents' answers, had to be clearly signaled and fully translated and explained in the interview transcripts. Once complete, all the interviews were transcribed into English or, in the event this was not possible, into their native language with all the relevant passages relative to the research questions translated into English. While it would have been ideal to translate each interview in its entirety into English, the cost of doing this and the practicalities of timing meant that this could not be done at this stage in all countries. The translated responses to each of the questions were then made available for the research team to use.

Explaining the Questions

The questions were designed not only to capture the most relevant perceptions of populism from these two target groups, but also to attempt to unravel what could be underpinning some of their ideas, always considering the comparative dimension, as previously explained. This means that the questions had to be simple and straightforward and had to make perfect sense to both groups, that is to say, they could not be focused merely on journalistic culture issues or on polity-related subjects, but they had

to be meaningful to both target groups. There were five main questions which, in some cases, additionally included short follow-up questions. The questions were devised to illustrate the key themes that are usually related to the formation of perceptions of populism: The broad *meaning* of populism for each of these two target groups in different European countries; the *perceived consequences* of populism in their country and in democracy in general; the *reasons for the popularity* of populist political actors; the *social issues* that are most related to populism (if any, in their opinion) in their own country; and, finally, the *role of the media*, both mainstream media outlets and social media, in spreading or containing populist ideas and discourse. These questions were thus also related to the issues addressed in other parts of this volume.

The specific aim of the first question, ‘What do you understand by populism?’, was to determine what the interviewees recognized as populism and to take note of the examples of populist political actors, both national and international, that were mentioned by them (specific instructions were given to the interviewers to specifically ask for at least two examples of populist politicians and populist political parties, one national and one international, in case respondents had not referred to any specific examples in their answer). Linking specific examples to the interviewees’ understanding allowed us insight into the coherence of their views about populism and, at the same time, to explore whether there were mainly differences or similarities in what journalists and politicians in different countries consider prime examples of populist political actors (both individuals and institutions, such as political parties). From this question, we were also interested in noting whether the interviewees had a clear idea about what populism is and means, or whether they gave a vague appreciation of these developments and phenomena (country teams were asked to consider whether the interviewees provided a clear definition or not). In addition, the study aimed to ascertain if populism was perceived by the interviewees as something mainly positive, negative, or both, or indeed neutral, and if they perceived it as mostly dependent on the political actors and the specific context.

The second question dealt with the *consequences of populism*, both in the interviewees’ own countries and more generally for democracy worldwide (‘What do you think the consequences of populism are for your country? And what are, in your view, the consequences of populism for the health of democracy in general?’). The objective of including this topic was to ascertain what the two groups, politicians and journalists, thought about the effects of populism. We considered it important to determine the types of effects that were named, and whether there were differences in Europe regarding the prevalence of negative versus positive effects of populism. Associating populism with a specific valence and to a determined type of effect also conveys important information regarding what the main perception of populism is, and could even, in some

cases, conflict with it. For example, a person considering populism to be the people participating in democracy and, at the same time, seeing it as something negative.

In question three we addressed the reasons for the success of populist political leaders and parties ('In your opinion, what are the reasons for the popularity of populist leaders and parties?'). The aim here was to understand what the interviewees thought about what explains the appeal of populist political parties and leaders and whether those causes were related to international versus national factors (e.g., society, politics, culture, media), or to political leaders' personal characteristics (charisma, clarity in communication, and so on).

Question four was aimed at exploring the *social issues* that these two target groups usually relate to populism in the 15 different countries ('Which social issues are most related to populism in your country?'). Interviewers received instructions to note the most important social issues (e.g., immigration, migration crisis, unemployment, cuts in welfare benefits, and so on), as well as specific measures and policies implemented by the national governments or the European Union, and to only ask for further information in cases in which clear examples had not been provided by the interviewee.

Finally, the last question on our list was related to the role played by the media ('In your country, to what extent are leading media outlets supportive or critical of populism? Do any media outlets behave in a populist manner? If so, which ones?'). The objective was to understand whether the interviewees saw populism as a broader phenomenon that could involve the media and explore these perceived connections: What is the general stance that media outlets take towards populism, do they cover populist ideas and actors, or are the media openly against populism and therefore refuse to cover populist ideas and actors or campaign against them? The interviewers received special instructions to ask specifically for examples of media outlets that acted in a populist manner and to try to understand why the interviewee considered those media outlets to be populist. This information is key to evaluating the role that is attributed by politicians and journalists to the media in spreading or containing populism in these different European countries.

Analyzing the Material

The richness and effectiveness of any interview study depends in part on the analysis of the material gathered. After the interviews were held and transcribed, the objective was to provide a coherent overview of the material collected from the multiple countries by systematizing the interviewees' responses and by deriving further information about the perceptions captured in the qualitative interviews. It was decided that the best way to achieve this within the budget and time frame was by using thematic

analysis. 'Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). While there are various approaches (see Braun & Clarke, 2006), it is an ideal method for analyzing qualitative data such as interviews. The strengths and pitfalls of using the method have been widely discussed (see Aronson, 1995; Braun & Clarke, 2006), but this type of approach provides a workable and cost-effective way to make sense of a potentially large amount of data produced from the interview process and, as such, was suitable for this study. The data collected through the interviews was then analyzed by the country teams in order to deconstruct and retrieve both direct quotes from the respondents' answers and meta-information, inferences that could be made from the way in which they answered the questions.

The researchers used the procedures outlined in Braun and Clarke (2006) and the actual national thematic analyses were conducted in two stages. Stage one involved the researchers from each country going through the responses to each question and identifying the key themes. This material was sent to the project coordinators together with the translated key passages from the manuscript of each interview. After this procedure, country teams were asked to further analyze the data by completing predetermined forms that contained specific information requests.

Namely, in the first question, which was related to the definition of populism from the point of view of the respondent, the additional information that was withdrawn from the interviews was based on the following guidelines: Does the interviewee provide a clear, or vague, definition of populism? Is the definition provided explicitly based on an individual politician (yes/no, who)? Is populism seen as negative, positive, or both? With regard to question two, which focused on the consequences of populism, researchers were asked to interpret the valence (positive, negative, or both) of the effects that had been named by the respondents, and to categorize them into specific types of effects, namely: social effects (e.g., citizen participation, increased racism and intolerance, etc.); party system effects (e.g., new political parties, unexpected electoral success of populist parties, etc.); policy effects (e.g., new policies focusing on issues raised by populist political actors). Similarly, the further analysis of question three also included some degree of categorization. In addition to identifying the main idea of what explains the appeal of populist leaders and parties according to the interviewee, researchers were asked to discern between different options and to illustrate with examples or quotes provided by the respondents. The following options were included: personal characteristics, political factors, social factors, media, or other reasons that should also be explained by researchers. In the supplementary analysis of question four, in addition to identifying the main issues that the interviewee had linked to populism, researchers also had to assess whether one issue had been prioritized over others (in the case more than one issue had been

referred to), to name the specific examples that had been provided, and to determine whether the social issues referred to by the respondents had been presented mainly as a cause, or a consequence, of populism. Finally, in the analysis of question five, which was related to the media and to the objective of ascertaining whether leading media outlets were supportive or critical of populism, researchers were asked to note the examples provided (populist media outlets and media that cover certain issues in a populist manner) and to retrieve the following meta-information: What is the perspective of the interviewee regarding whether leading media outlets cover populist political actors in his/her country?; if there is news coverage of populism; what is the interviewee's view on whether the media are predominantly critical or supportive of populism?; and the explanation behind that media stance.

Use of Terms in the Text

Given the sample size, composition, and selection, it was decided that it would be of little value to provide the exact number of people who responded in a particular way to each question. Such an approach was also deemed to run counter to a qualitative investigation of this nature. Instead, throughout the chapters we often use the terms 'many', 'a lot', 'mostly', 'a majority'. These words were chosen carefully to convey the scale of a particular response to questions. They are ambiguous in nature, used here in the following way. 'Minority': less than 50 percent. 'Few or not many': less than 30 percent. 'Majority': more than 50 percent of those responding but not more than 70 percent. 'Mainly or a lot': between 70 and 90 percent. 'Most': more than 90 percent of those interviewed.

Use of Direct Quotes

The inclusion of direct quotes was not deemed necessary for the research coherence, but it was deemed they would provide a useful insight into the views of interviewees in certain contexts. Once the interview material had been analyzed, it was agreed in the working group that the contributing authors would review the transcripts and identify possible quotes that could clearly illustrate a particular point of view. These quotes were provided together with an explanation of where they could fit best and what they best illustrated, and were included in the two chapters on the politicians and journalists' perceptions of populism whenever possible.

Ethical Considerations

Finally, considering the topic and the characteristics of the research approach, ethical considerations were of utmost importance to the project. Clear guidance was sent to all those involved in the research project.

Those unfamiliar with ethical research principles or those responsible for researchers that were unfamiliar were required to ensure that adequate training was undertaken and that all were familiar with guidelines and possible violations. There are numerous research ethics guidelines and in our case, the researchers adhered to the European Science Foundation's code of conduct on research integrity, which is available at <https://tinyurl.com/y6uo6ahu>.

In addition to this, country researchers needed to comply with their own university's ethical guidelines, ensuring prior ethical clearance from their own universities (documentation confirming this ethical permission was provided for the COST Action's records), and obtaining any further permissions from necessary committees for the research and the realization of the interviews with politicians and journalists. The interviewers required the explicit authorization of the interviewee to use their name and professional position. In cases where this permission was not granted, full anonymity was given as an alternative, provided that the national research team was directly and fully involved in the interview to avoid any potential use of false information. The political situation in some of the countries included in the study meant there was a need to safeguard certain interviewees, especially those who only felt safe to express their views anonymously. Each country team was responsible for securely storing the interview material and ensuring this complied with national and EU-wide data legislation.

Conclusion

This chapter provided background on the methodological approach adopted in the study of politicians' and journalists' perceptions of populism further explained in the next two chapters. The following two chapters are the product of a large-scale piece of qualitative comparative research involving researchers from 15 countries, conducting and analyzing some 96 interviews in 15 different languages. The study includes countries from Eastern, Western, Northern, and Southern Europe, which have experienced different ideological versions of populism and different levels of success of populist actors and ideas. Such large-scale qualitative projects tend to be the exception in comparative research, which is often largely quantitative in nature, in no small part due to the logistical and financial challenges such a large qualitative undertaking involves. The COST Action provided a unique opportunity to assemble a knowledgeable research team with the skills to make such an undertaking a reality. Besides the immediate linguistic advantages, such a team provided an in-depth culturally nuanced insight that could not be gained otherwise, and rarely by quantitative research. It is only with this knowledge that qualitative comparative research can be undertaken thoroughly and any reliable patterns identified. Indeed, without this it would have been very difficult to conduct a research project of this kind.

As noted from the outset, the project was a collaborative exercise. All working group members had the opportunity to provide input into each stage of the research process, from design through to the analysis and writing up. When designing the project, the approach taken was subject to much discussion. Members were committed to an interpretivist approach that gave voice to data subjects and examined and agreed on the sampling and analysis techniques as outlined. A project of this kind poses several challenges. For example, there was no budget to conduct research or pay professional translators, and these activities had to be conducted by team members.

Ethical considerations were of utmost importance to the project. Clear guidance was sent to all those involved in the research project, and those who were unfamiliar had to ensure that adequate learning was undertaken and that all were then familiar with guidelines and possible violations.

The qualitative approach to research adopted here results in very rich and complex datasets that have only started to scratch the surface in the next chapters. A lot is still left to investigate and disentangle in the data. Different research approaches based, for example, on critical discourse analysis or other forms of narrative analysis, could point to the existence of meaningful underlying differences across countries, not detected through thematic analysis (even though several layers of analysis were performed in the current study). This was a first exploratory approach to a highly complex phenomenon aimed at describing and explaining perceptions and variation across countries. The role of journalists and politicians in interpreting and framing populism is not insignificant considering that their perceptions' impact on politics might, in turn, influence matters as important as the acceptance of democratic rules (freedom of expression, etc.), for example.

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3 Journalists' Perceptions of Populism and the Media

A Cross-National Study Based on Semi-Structured Interviews

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Introduction

While numerous studies have looked at the media coverage of populism and populist politicians (for a synoptic account, see Aalberg, Esser, Reinemann, Strömbäck, & de Vreese, 2017), few, if any, have sought to try to understand the phenomenon from the perspective of those seeking to report on populism. Given the importance of the media to the spread and success of populist parties across Europe, understanding the perceptions of journalists is crucial. The news media are a central source of political information for publics and politicians, and journalists are key in shaping that information. In this volume, Maurer et al. observe that journalists' perceptions are influential on the 'way news stories and opinion pieces are written, including the decision about if and what populist messages should be included' (p. 104). In this context, it is important to know how journalists understand the political phenomenon they report on and how they make sense of it. While there have been numerous studies of journalists' perceptions in different contexts (see, for example, Strömbäck & Karlson, 2011; Van Dalen & Van Aelst, 2014), as far as we can tell, journalistic understandings of populism have not been explored in any depth and none, to our knowledge, have done this in a comparative context.

Journalists operate with working definitions of who populists are and what populism is but populism has been described as a slippery concept, difficult to define (Taggart, 2000). How do journalists comprehend what is or is not populist? Definitions are important in labeling parties and actors and drawing an audience's attention to those actors and their policy positions. We do not know what kind of definitions journalists use. Are the labels applied with any critical reflection? Do negative definitions

dominate? It might well be that the dominant perceptions are negative. The majority of previous research suggests that populism has primarily negative consequences for democracies, but it was not clear whether this view is shared among journalists (Bartolini, 2011; Levitsky & Loxton, 2013; Mudde, 2004; Pasquino, 2008). It could be that views are more nuanced. For instance, it might be important to determine if these parties are on the left, or right, of the political spectrum.

If journalists' perceptions are unknown, their thoughts about the causes and consequences of populism are also unknown. For example, what do journalists attribute responsibility for the rise of populism to? Is it mainly to demand factors such as immigration or the economic crisis, or to supply-side factors such as the charismatic qualities of particular politicians? Again, in terms of the social and political consequences of populism, do journalists see these as negative in the main? We might expect negative perceptions to dominate, but we do not know. Finally, what do journalists make of the role of the media in the rise and spread of populism? Research in this volume sheds light on populist media and media reporting of populists. It suggests that the media may well play a role in the promotion of populism and populists.

Previous research has observed that journalists, as a profession, share much across borders, including 'coherent values, role perceptions and beliefs' (see Pfetsch, 2014). Given this, we might expect that there is sufficient commonality in how those interviewed understand populism, its causes and consequences, their own role, and that of the media more generally, in its spread. These common understandings might emerge from journalists' news consumption as part of an inter-media agenda-setting process and the ubiquity of news online (Cassidy, 2007). That said, it could be that some clear differences emerge. For example, in this volume, Maurer et al. find that the more adversarial role perceptions are rooted in a country, the more populism is reported—similarly with predominance of market-oriented role perceptions. Whereas, where pedagogic role perceptions are more engrained, populist messages are less prevalent in that country. These are of course correlations, but they suggest that understandings of populism may differ according to varying journalistic role perceptions.

Another source of distinction might be related to the media outlet within which journalists work. Mazzoleni (2014) argues that tabloid media play a role in the promulgation of populism and are most likely to 'give passionate attention to what happens in the usually animated precincts of populist movements' (Mazzoleni, Stewart, & Horsfield, 2003, p. 16; see also Stanyer, 2007). However, in this volume Maurer et al. found that across all countries in their sample, there was no relationship between the volume of populist news stories and whether a media outlet was mass-market or up-market (but see Wettstein, Esser, Schulz, Wirz, & Wirth, 2018 for somewhat different findings).

On the political front, events and circumstances in national political life such as the presence, success, or failure of populist politicians, can

be said to exert an important influence on how populism, its causes, and its consequences might be understood. In several countries in the study, populist parties were in power and it is possible that this might exert some influence on perceptions (see Hameleers et al., 2018, for a similar argument and findings supporting this notion).

As noted in the chapter by Salgado and Stanyer, this current chapter draws on qualitative research interviews to provide an insight into the views of news professionals across 13 countries from Northern, Eastern, and Southern Europe (Bosnia and Herzegovina; Bulgaria; Czech Republic; Denmark; France; Greece; Hungary; Romania; Italy; Portugal; Serbia; Spain; and Turkey). The aim of the in-depth interviews has been to tease out journalists' understanding of populism, allowing journalists to respond in their own words. More information about methods used in the study can be found in the chapter by Salgado and Stanyer. This chapter focuses on five key areas which guided the qualitative interviews. These are: what journalists understand by the concept of populism; the identification of populist politicians; the issues most related to the rise of populism; its perceived consequences; and, whether the media are supportive, critical, or, indeed, whether they behave in a populist manner.

Understanding What Is Meant by Populism

At the start of the interviews, journalists were asked what they understood by the term populism, in order to learn more about what they recognize as populism and how they perceive it. The aim was to elicit some working definitions that they employ to decide who, in the world of politics, is populist and who is not. Some of the main themes which emerged from the responses of the journalists, are set out below.

Populism as an Ideology

Most (for a definition of how this term is used, please see the chapter by Salgado and Stanyer) interviewees saw populism as an ideology or something related to the appeal of individual politicians. Further, it was often made sense of as a general trend in the European and international context (especially in relation to the US, Russia, and Venezuela). Only a minority (for a definition of how this term is used, please see chapter by Salgado and Stanyer) of those interviewed provided a weak and unclear definition of populism.

Populism as an Electoral Strategy

For some journalists interviewed, populism could be considered 'a necessary and universal political strategy', given there were 'traces of populism in the program of almost every political party' (Czech Republic). Populism is, according to this opinion, 'aimed at voting' (Greece), or 'political

marketing' (Czech Republic). Some emphasized the more negative elements of this, describing it as shallow, akin to the 'selling of appearances' (Spain), part of the political game, full of 'demagoguery and over-simplification' (Portugal) in order 'to gain popularity with over-simplistic messages' (Portugal and Hungary), with no 'real value proposals' (Portugal). But, in this context, a majority (for a definition of how this term is used, please see Chapter 2 in this volume) spoke of 'lies' and 'manipulation' and making 'unrealistic promises', while others observed it was appealing to 'the lowest passions' (Serbian journalist) of voters. The general view was that populism was not specific to any party, but more a means of achieving electoral success via dishonesty and manipulation. These views were expressed in all the countries of our sample.

Populism as a Problematic Concept

Some journalists were more critical of the concept itself, especially those from France (Hubé & Truan, 2016). The French journalists interviewed considered populism a 'buzzword in the media, an insult to defame a political opponent'. The Romanian and Italian journalists were also critical of the interpretative dimension of this concept ('The ideological positions of these movements strongly differs') (Italian journalist), so that populism is a tool to describe political competition. Similarly, a Czech journalist with a center-right perspective considered populism an artificial label used to discredit political opponents, and he refused to differentiate between populist and traditional politics since populist tendencies can be, according to him, traced to the program of any political party.

Populism as Pejorative Label

The interviews also explored whether journalists saw populism as a positive or negative force or something that had both positive and negative impacts. Across all 13 countries, populism was seen overwhelmingly as negative, with most considering it to be a malign force. This was similar to the views of the politicians interviewed, with the exception of those from populist parties (see Salgado et al. in this volume). In comparison, there were far fewer mixed responses, and only a small number of journalists in eight countries acknowledged any positive aspects. There were no clear patterns in the mixed responses, which came from journalists across the political spectrum and from those working for different media outlets. The most positive views came from a journalist who worked for an online right-wing populist media outlet in Hungary.

Identifying Populist Politicians

Interviewees were asked to provide examples of populist politicians, both in their own countries and abroad. Most were able to name at least one

politician in their own country. In some countries, there was a clear consensus across the different media outlets about who these actors were. In Bosnia, for example, those journalists questioned referred to Milorad Dodik, a Bosnian politician. In Serbia, President Aleksandar Vučić was mentioned. In Spain, journalists referred to Pablo Iglesias and Podemos. In most countries, journalists mentioned two or more examples. In the Czech Republic, the November 2017 election results signified a huge shift in Czech politics, as the established parties lost a significant part of their electoral support and previous minority or non-parliamentary parties succeeded. Three (out of four) journalists named those new party leaders (new Prime Minister Andrej Babiš, a Czech oligarch; President Miloš Zeman or, more generally, the ANO movement) as the ideal representation of populism. In some countries where populist parties have been successful in recent elections (Bulgaria, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Portugal, and Serbia), journalists named a current party leader (for example Alexis Tsipras, Viktor Orbán, Marine Le Pen, or Jean-Luc Mélenchon) as quintessentially populist.

In several instances, though, the journalists avoided or refused to give an example, or suggested that all politicians could be populist. For example, in Hungary, only one journalist cited Viktor Orbán; the others declined to name anyone. In some cases, there seemed to be a reluctance to point to an obvious example. In Turkey, none of the journalists labeled Turkish President Erdoğan as populist despite this label being applied elsewhere in Western news media.

When asked to provide examples of a populist politician outside of their country, most had a similar idea of who was a populist politician. There is clearly a common idea among the journalists of the personification of a populist politician. All interviewees identified Donald Trump; others, but not all, mentioned Marine Le Pen in France, Beppe Grillo in Italy, Geert Wilders in the Netherlands, and Nigel Farage in the UK. All of these actors have been especially prominent in international news over the period of the study.

In addition to internationally newsworthy politicians, interviewees also mentioned examples in neighboring countries, or countries where there was some cultural affinity. For example, respondents from Bosnia named a politician in Croatia; those from Serbia mentioned Vladimir Putin (a name absent from other interviews); those from Turkey mentioned the AfD in Germany and Alexis Tsipras in Greece. Overall, there were no clear patterns by country, media type, or political persuasion in terms of identifying populist politicians.

In sum, the interviews provided insight into the working definitions of populism used by journalists. For some, populism was an ideology and for others an electoral strategy implemented by politicians. Others still were critical of the term, seeing it as a problematic label and, as some noted, an ‘empty signifier’ (Spain) or an ‘empty vessel’ (Czech Republic). Most

saw populism as unequivocally negative with only a minority mentioning possible positive aspects. All could point to parties and politicians widely understood to be populist.

When the authors looked for any evidence of difference between countries, type of media (TV, print, or Internet), or effect of the political positioning of the media, little could be found. Indeed, journalists working for populist-supporting media outlets defined populism similarly to journalists working for mainstream or serious news media.

Reasons for the Popularity of Populist Leaders and Parties

Journalists were asked what they considered to be the reasons for the popularity of populist leaders and parties, and about the social issues most linked to the rise of populism in their countries. The aim was to tease out any significant themes related to populism expressed by journalists. This section seeks to identify any shared or unique features which journalists consider to be important in understanding the rise of populism in their country, including the impact of international and/or national factors, the part played by the personal characteristics of particular political actors, and the possible role of the media. The journalists' responses were divided into demand-side factors, deriving from international and national political and economic conditions, and supply-side factors, related to the nature of the populist response (see Mudde, 2007).

Demand-Side Factors

Immigration

Starting with the demand-side conditions, the most common theme raised by all countries and by the majority of journalists was immigration and the refugee crisis, which is an understandable finding given the migration of people from the Middle East to Europe, and the capability of European leaders to form an effective response to the crisis. In the case of Italy, this can be understood as a consequence of the fact that Italy has proven to be an important host country in Europe for refugees and immigrants. However, immigration was also mentioned in countries not strongly affected by the European migration crisis. The example of the Czech Republic, where immigration is considered one of the main populist topics despite the fact that its impact on the country was minimal, reveals, according to Czech journalists, ways in which populists use these 'made-up problems' to exploit peoples' fears and their 'feeling of being under threat, both from the inside and from the outside'. Journalists from Bosnia, the Czech Republic, Italy, and Turkey emphasized the migrant crisis and the associated perceived economic strains.

While in most countries immigration was seen as the main issue associated with the rise of populism, this was by no means the same for all countries. Among the 13 countries, journalists in Spain, Bosnia, and Romania, regardless of the political orientation of media outlets, did not associate populism with immigration or the refugee crisis at all. Economic issues were seen as important factors in Spain, Greece, and Romania, and a number of nationally specific issues also emerged (see below).

Financial Crisis

Many interviewees mentioned economic issues as one of the main drivers of populist support. The economic recession beginning in 2008, and the period of economic austerity and unemployment that followed, was cited as a significant factor by journalists from Spain, Greece, Italy, and Portugal (see also, for example, de Vreese, Esser, Aalberg, Reinemann, & Stanyer, 2018, and the introduction to this book). In some cases, such as Italy, the disadvantaged economic position of the younger generation with poor job prospects was perceived as a precondition for populist popularity. In Italy, two of the journalists interviewed suggested that younger voters with no memory of war and dictatorship had little knowledge of, or interest in, politics, and their disengagement had also contributed to the rise of populism. Journalists from Bulgaria cited disparities between their country and older and wealthier EU Member States as providing fertile ground for populism. This observation seems to echo the idea that *relative deprivation* may be a key driver of populist success (see the chapter by Hamelaers, Andreadis, & Reinemann in this volume).

Spanish and Romanian journalists made connections between the financial crisis and the increase of inequality, income and social welfare issues, poverty risk, unemployment and corruption—all described as social scourges. However, for journalists belonging to countries outside the Eurozone (such as Hungary and Turkey), financial recession was not perceived as a topic associated with populism.

A range of issues connected to the financial crisis were also mentioned. These included unemployment or low wages (Portugal, Greece, Hungary, Spain, Czech Republic, Bulgaria, France); low living standards among European citizens, which took many forms, such as poverty (Hungary, Spain, Serbia, Bulgaria); home evictions (Spain); social inequality (Italy, Spain, France, Czech Republic); retirement reforms (Denmark, Serbia); taxes (Denmark, France, Czech Republic); corruption (Spain, Portugal, Bulgaria, Serbia, Czech Republic); or promises of lowering prices of selected popular goods as a populist strategy (Czech Republic).

Nationalism and Ethnic Minorities

The examples of Bosnia and Serbia reveal how specific national contexts and history influence the topics set by populist politicians—it is

predominantly the ethnic issues clearly related to national and ethnic relationships in former Yugoslavian countries (ethnic rights and territorial divisions, centralization vs. further division of the country, nationalism as the consequence of the breakup of Yugoslavia) that journalists in Serbia and Bosnia, regardless of their ideological inclinations, mention as priorities on the populist agenda. Bulgarian journalists stressed the importance of 'the catastrophic demographic problem' (aging, emigration, low birth rate) leading nearly to the 'disappearance' of Bulgaria and the unresolved ethnic problem (the integration of the Roma people) as the main populist issues. Fear of terrorism was also raised (Portugal).

Religion

In France, journalists considered Islam to be an issue and explained the predominance of Islamophobia in populist rhetoric as a consequence of the proliferation of jihadist attacks in France, and the concentration of people of Muslim faith in certain, often disadvantaged, districts of large French cities. In Turkey, journalists raised religious issues, the Kurdish question, ethnicity, cultural diversity, and security concerns. Most of these special issues of a local nature, combined with other more usual topics such as the refugee crisis and wages, are seen by the three Turkish journalists not merely as the cause of populism, but as a servant of it.

Two Spanish journalists, working for right-wing and left-wing outlets, raised specific social themes. The first related populism to the decline of important institutions, such as church and family. Specifically, he referred to the special issue of anti-clericalism, aimed at educating people to hate the institution of the Church, as well as to a 'tribal education conception', meaning the disappearance of family unity ('traditional family' as an important populist topic is also mentioned by a Romanian journalist with a center-left leaning). The second journalist associated populism with the reformation of the education and health system in Spain.

Among the less common themes raised were the necessary protection of Christianity and the danger of destruction of the European Christian civilization (Serbia and Bulgaria's center to center-right journalists).

Political Elites

Journalists identified the actions of political elites as an issue. While a right-wing Serbian journalist connected anti-elitism with conspiracy theories and attacks against the 'enemies of the people', the Czech public service and left-wing journalists mentioned the 'urban elites', intellectuals, the traditional/mainstream media, and people with an education in the humanities (the so-called 'coffee house' set) as the typical targets of

populist criticism. European (dis)integration and EU criticism as important populist issues are mentioned by center to left-wing journalists from France, Denmark, and the Czech Republic. That said, Euroscepticism is not as widespread as might have first been thought.

Crisis of Democracy

One of the most frequent responses related populism's rise to a perceived crisis of liberal democracy and, in particular, the lack of responsiveness of mainstream political parties who have lost the trust of society and are perceived to be an elite, insisting on consensual solutions. Journalists across Europe saw this crisis of legitimacy as leading to voter disengagement from mainstream politics; some noted specifically weak national democratic cultures (Bosnia, Serbia, Turkey).

There were other demand-side issues mentioned by journalists. Globalization was raised by journalists from Bosnia and the Czech Republic as the driving force behind changing values leading to social changes in gay and minority rights. Journalists from the Czech Republic also cited Russian interference contributing to confusion and distrust in the Czech Republic. These were references from journalists working in media outlets with different political orientations.

Supply-Side Factors

In terms of supply-side factors, interviewees were asked whether the personal characteristics of particular political actors played a role in populism's popularity. Almost all journalists (apart from those from Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Portugal, and France) thought they did not. However, journalists from Bosnia, Serbia, and Italy referred to the importance of particular politicians in gaining support for populism, and an Italian journalist also referred to the role of charisma. A second reason given by journalists related to populist politicians' and parties' effective response to the trends mentioned above. Populist politicians and parties were perceived as openly naming problems and raising important issues that people are concerned about such as unemployment, corruption, and migration.

Respondents pointed to their ability to trigger powerful emotions such as hope and fear. A journalist from Bosnia suggested that populists know how to play the fear card by inventing threats or, in the opinion of another Bosnian journalist, fanning nationalist feelings. Journalists from the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, and Greece stated that populists lie to the people but that they do so in a way which seems to make complicated issues comprehensible. Indeed, one of the key reasons for their popularity, in the view of most journalists, was precisely this ability to offer apparently simple solutions to complex issues that are understood by ordinary people. Populist politicians were accused of saying what the people

want to hear and, in the view of journalists from Bulgaria and Hungary, engaging with their dreams and their frustrations, offering themselves as a kind of messiah or savior. Journalists from Italy mentioned how populist campaigns manage to align themselves successfully with public opinion and use an 'Americanized' or professionalized approach to campaigns. Journalists from Romania, Greece, and Portugal suggested that the success of UKIP, Donald Trump, and Brexit had provided a spur to populism. Populists in Greece, Portugal, and Italy were considered to target less well-educated groups and those who live in rural and marginalized areas and follow politics through television and social media rather than through newspapers.

In sum, there was commonality in journalists' views across Europe about the reasons for populism's popularity, with some nationally specific causes being identified in individual countries. There was little difference in views between journalists working for mainstream news outlets and those considered to be populist, nor in relation to the ideological profiles of media outlets or between regions. It should be noted that in the view of some journalists, any issue had the capacity to be populist. Two journalists in Hungary, both of whom work for media outlets of center-left political orientation, argued that populism can be related to anything, in the sense that populist approaches can be applied to any social issue. A Danish journalist, working for a tabloid newspaper, claimed, in a similar way, that 'any issue can be discussed in a populist manner'. For these journalists it was not so much the issue itself, but more the way it was communicated to the public—any issue could be expressed in a populist manner.

The Consequences of Populism

Given that populism was seen overwhelmingly as a malign force, the probability that the consequences of populism were also seen as mainly negative was also high. When journalists were asked by the interviewers what they thought the consequences of populism were, both for their own countries and for democracies generally, the picture painted by journalists across the sample was clear: Populism had mainly negative consequences for democracy, both in their own country and in general. In fact, all journalists from Bosnia, Czech Republic, Greece, Romania, Serbia, Turkey, and Portugal only referred to negative consequences.

Negative Consequences

Journalists frequently mentioned that populism delegitimizes democracy and its institutions in their countries (for example, Bosnia, Greece, Italy, Romania, Serbia, or Spain), it leads to more polarization, and in some cases, even radicalization and fear-mongering (mentioned by journalists

in Bosnia, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Serbia, Turkey, and France). Populism also degrades public debates by over-simplifying complicated societal issues and ignoring ‘real’ problems (mentioned by journalists in Bosnia, Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Portugal, or Serbia), or exacerbating bigotry, racism, prejudices, and xenophobic attitudes. The main consequences for democracy in general were related to its overall undermining of trust in its institutions. The economic and policy consequences mentioned by journalists were also mostly just as negative. For example, populism leads to poor decisions for the economy and to ineffective and overly biased policy-making.

Positive Consequences

Only four journalists (from Hungary, Italy, Spain, France) mentioned that populism has positive consequences, and from these, only one (Hungary) was employed at a media outlet labeled as populist by journalists. The positive consequences included were, first, increased citizen participation. The appearance of populist movements can further inclusionary politics by expanding democratic participation of previously marginalized social groups and by introducing different issues into the agenda. Second, some noted the revitalization of democracy and a renewal of the political class as a potential positive outcome. Populism may also have a positive consequence for the development of democratic societies. Such benefits of populism can be observed in Latin American populism, and it was discussed in Europe with the emergence of political actors such as Podemos in Spain. The most commonly mentioned positive effects were associated with the political system, the quality and resilience of democracy, particularly representative democracy, and democratic institutions. Social effects were also considered in the sense of populism improving political participation.

Although, according to this sample of journalists, the consequences were not the same everywhere, some patterns emerged. The tendency to consider populism harmful was more pronounced when journalists came from countries with populist political actors in government. Taking social effects as another example, these can be mainly positive or negative depending on whether interviewees are thinking about left or right-wing populism. It was notable that some consequences of populism seem to overarch most perspectives: radicalization of positions and over-simplification of issues.

In sum, the themes that emerge from the interviews about the consequences were de-legitimization and erosion of democratic institutions, lack of trust in representative democracy, shallow politics, malleability of the truth, instrumentalization of fear and anxiety, fragmentation, and discrimination; but, on a positive note, citizen participation and renewal of politics. Moreover, journalists across countries seem to agree on these themes with limited systematic differences across the sample.

Media Outlets as Supporters or Critics of Populism

Journalists were asked if media outlets in their countries were broadly supportive or critical of populism. The responses, perhaps not surprisingly, were varied. The analysis of the interviews showed that in most of the countries, the news media were seen to be critical of populism and it was only in the cases of Bosnia, Greece, and Turkey that all the interviewees stated that in general the media were not critical regardless of the type of media and its political leaning. Portugal was the only country where all journalists agreed that the media tends to be critical toward populist discourse. In the words of a journalist, a possible explanation is the critical awareness by journalists of the consequences of this type of politics.

Media as Critics of Populism

A common feature in most of the interviews was that left-wing media outlets were considered to be the main opponents of populism. This was also the case for quality newspapers where journalists seemed to be more aware of their social role and democratic responsibility, compared to other media. A good example can be found in the interviewee from a French center-left quality newspaper, who underlined that there was a critical consensus: 'It is consensual to criticize [populism] and therefore—as a backlash—we are harshly criticized [in our turn]. This strengthens the break between media and populism'. Another feature was that for the mass-market or tabloid media, the boundary between the popular and populists was blurred since they want to speak the language of the people, leading to an increasing simplification and dramatization of politics.

Media as Supporters of Populism

In Bosnia, Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey, the media are widely perceived as supportive of and, to some degree, the creators of populism and populist messages, while in Italy, Portugal, Serbia, Spain, and France, the media is largely seen as challenging populism. This ties to some extent with the findings of Blassnig et al. in this volume, which show journalists are most likely to include populist messages in the news in Bulgaria and Greece, and least likely in Italy and Serbia.

One of the primary reasons for media support for populist policies mentioned by journalists in the sample countries was media ownership by political actors and the economic power and political power of ruling elites, including governments. Political ties and close relations of media and political actors were frequently cited by the journalists. Other factors were also considered. Rather than explanations based on the centrality of political actors' power, in Greece and Hungary, interviewed journalists suggested that 'political stances of media institutions'

were a determining factor for support for populist policies. As a result, pro-government media can be supportive, while opposition media take a more critical stance. In the Greek case, the media was perceived as the promoter of populism because of a mutual need for simplification, and because of populist production of fake news. In Italy, it was considered that the media boost populism by covering their permanent political campaigning. Some interviewees identified the underlying reasons for media support, such as media ownership and strong ties between media owners or journalists and political actors, as an issue (Bosnia, Czech Republic, France, Greece, Hungary, Romania, Serbia); in others, they identified small media markets (Bulgaria, Hungary) and lack of strong journalist standards (Denmark, France, Italy, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Spain, Turkey).

Some of these characteristics were linked to the socialization of the elite (strong ties between owners or journalists and politicians, or journalistic standards), while others are much closer to the media market, which is linked to economic questions (small market). Moreover, several aspects related to the relevance of populist parties in the political and parliamentary life of a given country, the political leaning of the media outlets considered, and the type of media, i.e., quality/public vs. tabloid/commercial media.

However, media support for populism is also considered an outcome of the media's own deficiencies. For instance, in Bosnia, the analysis of our sample shows that poor regulation or lack of understanding about the role of media in democracies can encourage support for populist policies through certain news media outlets. Lastly, media was assumed to be organically populist in some countries such as Bulgaria, Serbia, and Turkey, acting as a mediator between political actors and the public, transmitting populist discourse and policies. The characterizations of the media by some journalists as a mediator of populism corresponds with this idea.

What could be seen in popular media was that they give space to populism through opinionated articles. Since the thoughts, or sometimes even the lines, from one article appear in articles by other media, the connections between these media outlets are visible. Some of the interviewees described this process as dysfunctional press. Some interviewees noted that some journalists are standing with populist parties; therefore manipulated or moderated messages will dominate the news cycle that will undermine the non-populist media's agenda.

In sum, overall there were no clear patterns across countries or regions. In some, the media were seen as supportive, while in others they were critical. The reasons for support often concerned political ties, a lack of strong journalistic standards, or competitive media market. Overall, where there was more criticism it was perceived to emanate from left-leaning media and quality newspapers.

Conclusion

The interviews provided valuable insight into media professionals' perceptions of populism and populist politicians. The design allowed for important consideration of the national and media contexts in order to enable the authors to detect any patterns in perceptions.

Perhaps not surprisingly, all those interviewed were aware of populism and, perhaps again not surprisingly, there was no single definition of populism. All journalists interviewed were able to provide a working definition, even if in some cases it was vague. The emphasis varied. For some, it was an ideology and for others, it was, in effect, electioneering, part of the political game. Others emphasized the problematic nature of the concept itself, it being, in the words of one journalist, an empty signifier, a label that could be applied in a variety of contexts. There was some critical reflection, if limited to a few journalists. Most journalists were able to provide examples of populist politicians from their own countries and although some were reticent about naming any, all were able to point to international examples. Most definitions accentuated the negative, although a very small minority identified positive positions too.

In reflecting on the reasons for the popularity of populist journalists, it was clear that there were several demand and supply-side factors such as immigration, and the ability of populists to capitalize on these. Populist politicians were considered effective in responding to problems. This interplay between conditions and politicians seemed to be true across countries and media outlets.

In terms of the issues underlying populism, immigration was seen as the main issue associated with the rise of populism, however, this was by no means the same for all countries. Economic issues, such as the financial crisis, were seen as important factors in Spain, Greece, and Romania, and a number of nationally specific issues also emerged. Others pointed to religion in general and Islam in particular, and ethnic minority/majority group relations. These were interrelated themes, affecting mainly the economic prosperity and social cohesion of European societies. Generally, however, the views of journalists regarding the key issues driving populism seem to reflect the findings of academic research (see, for example, the introduction to this volume). Therefore, we can assert that, at least in this respect, decisions on how to cover populist actors and the social underpinnings of their success seem to be grounded in appropriate notions of the problem.

The journalists were aware of the consequences of populism. Again, these were seen as largely negative across countries, and included: de-legitimization and erosion of democratic institutions; lack of trust in representative democracy; shallow politics; malleability of the truth; instrumentalization of fear and anxiety; fragmentation; and discrimination. On a positive note, some mentioned increased citizen participation and renewal of politics.

This negative sense was especially palpable in countries where populists were in government. There was also variation depending on whether the journalists were referring to right or left-wing populism, the latter being seen more positively. There was also a tendency to consider populism to be harmful when journalists came from countries where populist political actors were in government. In terms of the social effects, whether these were mainly positive or negative depended to some extent on whether interviewees were thinking about left or right-wing populism.

In reflecting on the role of the media in the rise of populism, some journalists considered the media to be supportive while others considered it critical. They articulated the reasons for media support for populism as related to political ties and lack of strong journalist standards or a competitive media market. Overall, critical media tended to be the left-leaning media and quality news outlets. This, however, is perhaps not surprising given the fact that in most of the countries under study, right-wing populist parties have been more successful than left-wing parties.

As noted, those involved in the study were interested in whether there were any clear patterns in journalists' perceptions of populism. There were no clear regional differences in our sample on any of the issues. Obviously, the respective national situations regarding populism and the part played by the media had a huge impact on perceptions of populism. Similar to other results presented in this book, this finding suggests that over-generalizing the causes and mechanisms involved in populist success may often be inappropriate. There was also little distinction between the media outlets journalists work for. Our findings echo Maurer et al. in this volume, although those working for outlets that supported populist parties did have a more positive view of populism than those who did not. There were some shared perceptions in some countries in the study where populist parties were in power, but this by no means applied to all. Overall, the lack of strong patterns might be a product of the sample size and the nature of the sample, but also might suggest that journalists share many common understandings of populism, its causes and consequences, their own role, and that of the media more generally in populism's spread.

Note

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4 Politicians' Perceptions of Populism and the Media

A Cross-National Study Based on Semi-Structured Interviews¹

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Introduction

Why is it important to study politicians' perceptions of populism? The way in which something is regarded and understood is of the utmost importance for its impact on politics and society in general. Given the complexities in defining 'populism' and understanding its meaning, and in view of it being commonly referred to as a 'vague', 'slippery', 'elusive' concept (e.g., Canovan, 1981, 1984; Taggart, 2000; Barr, 2009; Lucardie, 2009; Woods, 2014), this study addresses the concept and its potential implications through the views of politicians who represent some of the most important political parties in 11 European countries and who are therefore important opinion-makers. The main objective is to discern what politicians from the various countries and different types of political parties understand by populism and how they perceive the causes and implications of these phenomena in their countries, and, more broadly, in European and global contexts.

Interviews were conducted with politicians from 11 European countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, and Spain. The sample is therefore composed of countries representing different regions in Europe, including from Southeastern, Eastern, Central, Northern, and Southern Europe. The political parties were selected taking into account their overall electoral expression in their respective countries and their representativeness on the right-left political spectrum. In addition, populist and non-populist parties were included in all countries, except Romania. The study therefore includes a varied sample of political parties, including mainstream and fringe, center-left and center-right, radical and/or extreme left and right, and populist and non-populist parties (for further information about the

research decisions and the methodological approach, see the chapter by Salgado and Stanyer in this volume).⁴

This chapter is divided into five main sections which correspond with the five main topics addressed in the interviews with politicians, namely: ‘What do you understand by populism?’, ‘What are the consequences of populism?’, ‘What explains the popularity of populist leaders and parties?’, ‘What social issues are most related to populism?’, and ‘What role do the media play in populism?’

What Do You Understand by Populism?

For several years, populism in Europe was a synonym for far-right parties and closely related to the issues of immigration, law and order, and often also nationalism (see Mudde, 2004, 2007; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Rydgren, 2017). The Euro crisis and the emergence of successful social movements, which in some cases evolved into political parties (e.g., Podemos, Syriza), launched the discussion regarding what populism means and what it is in Europe currently. The fact that Podemos, for example, identifies itself as a populist party, is extremely interesting (see Sanders, Molina, & Zoragastua, 2017), since often even commonly labeled populist parties avoid the denomination due to its negative connotation in European politics.

In this study, we seek to learn more about what politicians recognize as populism and how they perceive this phenomenon today. The sample included a variety of countries from different European regions and politicians representing various political parties with different political orientations, including populist and non-populist parties. Both the descriptions and the examples given by politicians in the interviews were assessed to see whether they had a clear view of what populism is and what it means, and if they perceive it as something inherently negative, positive, or both, depending on the context.

Politicians from most of the countries included in our sample stated that populism had multiple, often contradictory, meanings (e.g., Bulgaria, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Poland, Portugal, and Romania). The ambiguity of the concept, noted by more than half of the interviewees, clearly reflects the current use of the word to refer to different and often contradictory matters such as far-right ideology and nationalism, citizen participation, advocacy for the people, Euroscepticism, demagoguery, empty rhetoric, exploitation of emotions, and so on.

Also adding to the ambiguity is the fact that in the politicians’ descriptions of populism there is also some propensity to label as populist all politicians and parties that have a more aggressive political strategy (e.g., openly confrontational with opponents, clearly aiming to convince voters at any cost), since they seem to be willing to do more than others to gain popularity and achieve power, but when asked to provide examples,

a large majority of politicians focused on the most well-known cases of European populism, such as Marine Le Pen and the French National Front, Geert Wilders and the Party for Freedom, or Donald Trump in the US. Interestingly, Greek politicians referred mainly to examples in Turkey, Hungary, and Poland, or even to Angela Merkel's position in relation to the Euro crisis.

An overwhelming majority of these politicians perceive populism as something mainly negative, including all politicians interviewed from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Romania. In most other countries the results were mixed, with some politicians referring to populism as being predominantly negative, while others stated that they perceive it to be mainly positive. A third group tended to shape this answer according to the specific examples they had in mind.

There is nonetheless a clear pattern to be noted in this particular aspect of the perceptions of what populism is and what it entails. As expected, in general, politicians from populist political parties have mostly associated populism with a positive change in democratic politics and with positive political behaviors (e.g., Podemos in Spain, Forza Italia and Lega Nord in Italy, the Hungarian Jobbik, the National Renewal Party in Portugal, and the Danish People's Party). They view themselves as the true democrats and the only ones truly concerned with the people and the people's interests and needs. However, it is worth noting that even for some politicians from populist political parties, populism can be both negative and positive in certain instances (e.g., Fidesz in Hungary, the Bulgarian Coalition Patriotic Front, Syriza in Greece, MS5 in Italy). Interestingly, in some cases, such as the Norwegian Progress Party, the Polish party Law and Justice, or the Greek political party Golden Dawn, which are widely considered and recognized as populist, their politicians characterized populism as negative. The most likely explanation for this is that they do not accept being labeled as populist because society in general perceives populism negatively and they do not want to be associated with those negative perceptions and sentiments; or, another possibility is that they want to distinguish and distance themselves from other known national or international populist political parties and leaders.

The definitions of populism provided by these interviewees confirm this. Although occasionally politicians from mainstream parties recognized that the centrality of the people in populist politics is the spirit of democracy itself (and therefore something that in itself has to be considered positive), and some politicians from populist parties alluded to demagoguery and to the exclusionary nature of many populist ideals (e.g., the invariable presence of out-groups whose composition changes nevertheless according to ideology), as expected, most politicians from mainstream parties gave definitions of populism that presupposed negative perceptions of populism, and most politicians from populist parties considered it positive in their interpretation of what populism is and what it means today.

The most common themes in these politicians' definitions of what populism is and what it means were thus mainly related to negative perceptions: deceitful rhetoric; demagoguery; manipulation; deception; a strategy to gain power and win elections; vain promises; simplification of issues; misconception of reality; exploitation of emotions such as fear, anxiety, and resentment; aversion to mediation; and code words for racism. Above all else, populism is perceived as a communication style and a political style based on opportunism and exploitation of emotions to gain power. It is not frequently associated with specific issues and, where it is (e.g., Norway), the issue is mainly immigration. A Civic Platform MP from Poland, for example, linked populism directly to the 'fear of terrorism and outsiders'.

The idea of populism as ideology as defined by Canovan (2002), as a 'political appeal to the people' and the 'ideology of democracy', is present in the populist politicians' own perceptions of their approach to politics and is substantiated in the following themes that are simultaneously positive perceptions of populism: 'a form of politics focused on the people's interests and concerns' (M5S); 'speak the people's case' (Danish People's Party); 'caring about the people's real problems' (Jobbik); and 'hegemony of the people' (Syriza). Politicians from opposite sides and ideologies, right and left of the political spectrum, gave these very similar definitions of populism. Podemos' self-perception is slightly different; it appears to be particularly focused on changes in society and technology since it perceives populism mainly as a 'reaction to processes of modernization' and a form of popular mobilization.

As we can observe, there are no notable differences according to region in perceptions of populism from this sample of politicians: There are no marked differences across regions in Europe, north and south, west and east. There is also no clear dividing line between right- and left-wing populism, at least in what constitutes the way in which these politicians perceive populism.

What Are the Consequences of Populism?

For the vast majority of politicians interviewed across countries and mainstream parties, the effects of populism were negative. However, there were some exceptions. Although more rare, there were positive perceptions of the impact of populism on democracy which were largely, although not exclusively, confined to representatives of populist parties, similar to what we have already noted regarding perceptions of populism.

In Hungary, a politician belonging to the right-wing populist political party in government, Fidesz, considered populism not to have consequences since it was, in his view, a feature embracing the entire political system. In particular, he described it as an 'effective tool' for all politicians

being thrown into the fight of the elections, which is devoid of any effects on society. In Denmark, a Danish People's Party politician noted that populist parties were a check on elected elites. These views were also apparent from a Lega Nord politician in Italy. A politician of a center-right populist party (Forza Italia) also noted that it may contribute to making known unheard needs of citizens. In Portugal, the National Renewal Party representative perceived populism as putting the nation first. In Bulgaria, a politician from the party Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria claimed that neoliberalism is more dangerous than populism. And in Norway, the Progress Party provided a more nuanced view but one that was largely positive as well. There were no major differences between left- and right-wing populism. For example, in Spain a member of Podemos talked about the positive effects of populism as putting the 'last ones in front of the first ones'.

The interviewees were also asked specifically about what kind of effects populism and populists have. A wide range of effects were mentioned, both in a negative and positive context. Although there were no clear patterns, concerns tended to focus around societal impacts; in fact, the most commonly mentioned were some possible social effects. Social crises seem to be common (at least in the countries in our sample) and therefore a range of social effects were mentioned in the interviews. This kind of crisis takes many different forms but all directly affect the quality of people's life: social chaos and citizenship in 'virtual' reality and in a deficient democracy marked by the over-simplification of public debate (Greece); polarization (Poland); general social division and confrontation resulting in a negative context of discouragement and frustration (Spain); demagoguery and treatment of people as inferior (Portugal) or idiots (Hungary); decline of the public debate (Greece, Spain); as well as marginalization of significant issues (Italy). In Bosnia and Herzegovina and Bulgaria, interviewees pointed to a possible growing intolerance among citizens and a fracturing of societies.

Some respondents mentioned specific political effects. Politicians from the populist parties included in the study attribute populism to the many weaknesses of democracy, such as the malfunctioning or destruction of democratic institutions (Golden Dawn in Greece and Jobbik in Hungary, respectively), irresponsible policies against the common good (Law and Justice in Poland), and inflated political conflicts which render the formation of coalitions and governments a difficult process (Lega Nord in Italy).

In three Southern European countries (Greece, Spain, and Portugal), the representatives from the left-wing parties (Syriza, PSOE, and PCP, respectively) seem to share a common perspective: They associate the undemocratic forces derived from populism with a tendency of the political system to oversimplify issues, adversely affecting the public debate,

which is regarded harmful to democracy. But positive political effects were also mentioned in Poland: The perception of the positive aspect of populism is adopted by a left-wing politician (Democratic Left Alliance) who considers populism to be a double-sided phenomenon, and its positive side lies in the fact that it can assist political systems in addressing policy issues and implementing policy plans which would otherwise be difficult to address and implement.

When the interviewees were asked to reflect on the consequences of populism, both for their own countries and democracies more widely, a range of consequences were mentioned for democratic regimes in general and for their specific countries. No obvious patterns emerged among those interviewed, but the consequences of populism are widely regarded by politicians as detrimental to the effective functioning of democracy. With some exceptions, it seems to be a position that goes beyond political orientation. Some respondents spoke about the undermining of the entire democratic process (the Greek politician from Golden Dawn, for example, explicitly stated that democracy is not working due to populism). Others raised the specter of increased polarization and conflict across democracies; some mentioned declining faith in democracy and trust in politics, while still others pointed to the perennial simplification of complex factors that affect all states.

The consequences for specific countries were similar. Many mentioned social disorder and chaos and a wider fracturing of society as a risk to peace in extremis. Others noted increased polarization and a disillusionment with national politics and politicians. Some of those interviewed also mentioned the negative effects of populism on the economy and what this might mean for democracy. But some pointed to positive consequences for their countries, including greater inclusivity and political engagement. In addition, populism has, in some countries, led to a greater awareness of key issues, such as immigration, which could no longer be ignored by political elites. In Spain, a Podemos politician considered that there had been a re-politicization of society, including a kind of rapprochement of people with politicians, resulting in further involvement of citizens in political life as well as in politicians' obligations to think about programs and aspirations more adapted to popular claims. In Portugal, the leader of the extreme right-wing populist party, PNR (National Renewal Party), argued that populism benefits national identity, social justice, national production, and security forces in the context of a democracy that requires corrections and repairs.

In sum, the interviewees' perspectives do conform to the commonly held expectation that populism has a negative impact on democracy; however, there are important exceptions in which populism is viewed as a response to ill-functioning institutions that brings the promise of revitalizing democracy.

What Explains the Popularity of Populist Leaders and Parties?

The politicians interviewed characterized a situation in which populists have been more or less successful in describing problems in their national context and proposing solutions. This means that, in their view, disillusionment and disappointment with established parties and mainstream politicians, neglected voters, and real problems remaining unresolved are some of the most important reasons which explain why populists have been gaining electoral support in several European countries. While established parties have failed to address significant issues such as immigration and social issues in the aftermath of the economic and financial crisis in Europe, populist parties and politicians have taken the opportunity to occupy the empty space.

Political actors, particularly those from Eastern European countries and mainly from Hungary, maintain that the low level of education, dictatorship, and communist political socialization have given leeway for populist politics and a popular demand for simple solutions. Disappointment with the establishment is not only directed towards national parties, but also towards European institutions such as the European Union: The more disappointed people are with mainstream national parties or the EU, the more vulnerable they appear to be to populism.

To solve these problems, populist political actors are offering new approaches to democratic politics and different models of government to the disappointed people, according to our interviewees. In Norway, politicians described populists as talented at describing and appealing to conflict, creating dividing lines to engage people based on their description of society, and identifying 'the others' who are different from 'us'. They argue that populists will say anything the people want to hear and anything that is popular and engaging to them. The interviewees also described populists' adroit management of the complicated balancing act between triggering fear and offering hope as one of the reasons for their success: 'They know how to take advantage of the citizens' fears and anxieties' (Italy, Portugal) and 'playing with the most intense emotions and presenting themselves as saviours' (Bosnia and Herzegovina).

Personal characteristics were not mentioned frequently by the politicians to describe the reasons behind the popularity of populist leaders and parties. Charisma, which is often identified in the research literature (e.g., Weyland, 1999; Mény & Surel, 2002; Lubbers, Gijsberts, & Scheepers, 2002; Eatwell, 2004; Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008) as a typical characteristic of (successful) populist leaders, was hardly mentioned in these interviews. In fact, personal characteristics were not mentioned at all by the interviewees in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Denmark, Hungary, Poland, Spain, and Portugal. When personal characteristics were mentioned, populists were described either in terms of looks and personality

traits, charisma, rhetoric, or networking skills, such as (*looks*) amiable, handsome (Bulgaria); attractive (Greece); (*charisma*) charm (Bulgaria); charismatic leader (Greece); (*rhetoric*) attractive, but superficial rhetoric (Greece); communicate in a more understandable manner (Italy); leaders foster people's fears, peoples' mouthpiece and elite at the same time (Italy); communicate in a simplified, tabloid-style manner (Norway); (*networking*) connected to both left- and right-wing voters (Italy).

With varying weight, four political factors are mentioned in explanation of the popularity of populist leaders and parties. We can divide them according to 'issues', 'European Union (EU) relations', 'the established political system', and 'populists' solutions'. First, among *issues*, examples include references to the ethnic division of the country and the election system (Bosnia), migration and immigration (Bulgaria, Norway), poverty (Bulgaria, Norway), and centralization (Norway), all of which are specifically mentioned by most of the interviewees in these countries. Secondly, along those same lines, *EU relations* are repeatedly voiced as troubling, either because of the North/South cleavage in the EU (Italy), EU and NATO relations (Bulgaria), or that the EU mode of functioning has distorted democracy (Portugal). Thirdly, criticism of *the established political system* weighs in as a major political factor to explain the popularity of populists; factors include disappointment with mainstream parties or the political system (Portugal, Greece, Italy, Spain); established parties have failed to discuss significant issues (Norway, Poland); lack of reforms (Spain); incapacity to fully implement policies (Greece); abuse of power and corruption (Spain, Italy); and that political socialization (as a communist country) has discouraged critical debate (Hungary). Fourth and lastly, *populists' solutions* are mentioned as an important factor. In this regard, interviewees argued that populists are addressing issues of concern for many people (Italy, Norway), as well as reaching out to those neglected by other parties (Norway). Nevertheless, it was also mentioned that populists are making unrealistic electoral promises (Romania, Portugal) and that they are destroying past consensus on which the status quo was based (Greece).

Social and economic causes were also mentioned by these interviewees as potential explanatory factors for the success of populist actors. Although there are differences in the emphasis placed on specific aspects of economic hardship, its impact on social grievances is reflected in most interviews, with the exception of the Northern European countries included in our sample. The strongest statements are provided by Bosnian and Romanian politicians, who spoke about poverty and unemployment as the major social forces driving support for populism. All the Bulgarian politicians argued that populism is linked to poverty, which permeates socio-political issues. Also, in Poland, social welfare issues and unequal redistribution of the effects of economic modernization were noted as important factors.

Many Southern European countries' interviewees linked some of the causes behind the success of populism to the economic crisis. The rise of populist parties was explained by the unemployment and fear of becoming peripheral (Italy), the economic crisis and inability of the institutional structures to deal with it (Spain), economic insecurity and social uncertainty (Greece), and overall social dissatisfaction and economic hardship (Portugal). Greek politicians even referred to 'real problems' faced by the population as the genuine reason behind the success of populism.

Additionally, some of the politicians interviewed, mainly from Hungary and Romania, have also related economic hardship and poverty to the low level of education among sections of the electorate, which makes some people uncritical and more prone to believe in this type of electoral promise. Other politicians placed more emphasis on country-specific ethnic problems, for example, stigmatization and scapegoating of various minorities, i.e., Roma people or immigrants, as a tool for building political capital (Romania), or specific, long-lasting inter-ethnic conflict (Bosnia and Herzegovina).

The role of mainstream and social media as a factor in the popularity of populist actors was mentioned in several countries. The interviewees described different situations. On the one hand, news media actively engage in populism in their news coverage through the use of populist strategies: for example, some politicians (e.g., Hungary, Norway, Portugal) referred to appealing titles and tabloid simplicity as important factors facilitating the popularity of populism, while simplified dichotomizations and the over-personalization of political leaders were mentioned by interviewees from Italy and Romania. On the other hand, the cases in which news media simply cover populist political actors were also mentioned. A Spanish politician assessed this as a failure of the media system, but it was also considered both a structural, inadvertent effect of news values, as well as a consequence of commercialization and an attempt to garner more audience attention by covering the most spectacular aspects of party politics (Norway, Portugal). Or, simply, it was as a result of successful political communication strategies by skillful politicians (Portugal).

Some of these politicians have also emphasized the deliberate decision of specific news outlets to openly support populist political actors, such as the Polish public media. The Hungarian politician member of Jobbik recognized the weight of political control over the media, which coerces journalists into promoting the Fidesz agenda, thus providing Fidesz with extra salience and media visibility. A similar situation was reported by the interviewees from Bulgaria, where the politicization of news media is an issue (Raycheva & Peicheva, 2017).

Finally, the role of social media in amplifying populism was also emphasized (e.g., Greece, Portugal, Spain, Poland). Because social media allows for direct communication without barriers and in bypassing gatekeepers,

it contributes to augmentation of the visibility and, in some cases, the appeal of populists.

Although other more specific and country-related factors were also mentioned by these politicians (such as, for example, the efficient organization of populist parties (Spain) or the religious slogans used by populist politicians to attract support in the most traditional sectors of society (Romania)), they have clearly highlighted the effects of economic and political representation crises, as well as of communication and media factors, as causes explaining the success of populist actors.

What Social Issues Are Most Related to Populism?

In and of itself, populism does not need to be tied to specific social issues in the political debate. That is, by defining a political actor as populist, one has not implicitly defined which social issues that political actor primarily campaigns on. Populist politicians often argue that they address popular grievances and opinions that are supposedly ignored by governments, traditional parties, and mainstream media in order to show that they are on the side of the people (Canovan, 1999, p. 2). Often politicians will not define the people, but the appeal to ‘the people’ will be demonstrated in their campaign, to show how they would defend them from outsiders or economic downturns (see, e.g., Csizgó & Merkovity, 2017; Stanyer, Salgado, & Strömbäck, 2017; see also the introduction to this volume).

Yet, some social issues may be more suitable to populist political campaigning than others. First, immigration as an issue in public debate is often tied to anti-globalization policies where the main goal of the politicians is to defend ‘national’ or ‘traditional’ values. When this topic is used, the ‘us’ and ‘them’ political rhetoric becomes evident. Moreover, the issue is often linked to economic questions because (im)migrants are seen as a problem and political discourse often turns into debate about immigrants exploiting the welfare system and committing crime (Rydgren, 2004, pp. 485–486; Wodak, 2015, pp. 46–69).

Another important issue linked to populism is the economy itself. Recently, we have seen major economic upheaval in the Western world, e.g., the financial crisis beginning in 2007–2008, which was followed by the Euro crisis. During these crises, politicians were often faced with the dilemma caused by a clash between long-term economic interests and short-term benefits. Previous research has argued that populist political actors ignore this dilemma by focusing on short-term benefits (Gál, 2011, p. 159). Crises and economic uncertainty are considered important reasons behind the emergence and success of some forms of populism (e.g., Kriesi & Pappas, 2015; Salgado & Stavrakakis, 2018).

We therefore expected populist politicians, in particular, to focus mainly on immigration and the economy. To examine this expectation, politicians were asked the following question: ‘Which social issues are

most related to populism in your country?'. In line with our expectations, the economy—including poverty, social-economic inequality, and corruption—was mentioned frequently by politicians in the majority of the sampled countries (including Bulgaria, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, and Spain). Also in line with our expectation, (im)migration and ethnic differences were frequently mentioned across numerous countries (including Bosnia and Herzegovina, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Poland, and Portugal). Often, the immigration debate is linked to a debate about the European Union, which was mentioned by Bulgarian, Danish, and Polish politicians. Less often, welfare issues such as childcare or healthcare were mentioned by these politicians.

Immigration and the economy are international topics that could originate from the so-called European (im)migration crisis of 2015 or the financial crisis beginning in 2007–2008. Yet, it is important not to overlook substantial differences across countries and their historical roots. For instance, Hungary was one of the countries most severely affected by the migration crisis (see, for example Thorpe, 2017). This circumstance was exploited by populist parties, namely by Fidesz and partly by Jobbik. Yet the Hungarian media outlets were already divided long before the migration crisis, with one section of the media providing a platform for populist style communication (including on topics related to immigration), and the other section split between adapting to a populist and simplified debate or a critical approach, but in the latter case likely facing consequences (e.g., refusal of interviews or rejection of factual information on certain issues). The Hungarian interviewees emphasized that Fidesz was partly responsible for the previously mentioned media environment (simplification, lack of criticism in mainstream media, etc.), because the electorate were resonating positively with anti-immigrant messages, which served Fidesz's aim to be re-elected.

To mention other examples, immigration has been discussed in populist terms for several decades in Denmark (Bächler & Hopmann, 2017). Since at least the late 1990s, immigration has been one of the major political issues in Danish politics, clearly linked to the rise of the Danish People's Party founded in 1995, but also driven by a number of individual pundits who were given access to newspapers' op-ed pages. Immigration has emerged as the most decisive issue in Danish election campaigns since at least 2001, yet we have not witnessed a polarization of the Danish media landscape or of public opinion as we have in Hungary. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the political debate is less concerned with recent migration, but more with the outcomes of the 1995 Dayton Agreement and its power-sharing across the culturally and religiously diverse population of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Looking in more detail at the politicians' answers to our study, two noticeable results emerge. First, the answers provided by the politicians

did not reveal systematic differences between populist and non-populist actors within the analyzed countries. That is, both the group of politicians typically described as non-populist and those considered populist stated that populist political communication is mainly concerned with immigration or the economy. Second, in response to the question about what are the drivers of the populist political debate, the vast majority of politicians across countries see these issues as a cause for populism. That is, the reasoning appears to be that certain issues on the political agenda, such as immigration, for example, clearly call for a populist political style. A reverse reasoning, arguing that it is populist actors who promote issues such as immigration because they accord with a populist style of communication, did not receive support from those interviewed.

In short, across the sampled countries, issues relating to the economy (crises and economic uncertainty) and migration were most often perceived to be related to populism. Moreover, the politicians argued that these issues call for a populist style, rather than arguing that certain issues are promoted if they lend themselves more to a populist style of political communication.

What Role Do the Media Play in Populism?

As well as exploring politicians' perceptions of political populism, we were also seeking to understand whether politicians believed that populism extends beyond the political realm and is considered to be a feature of their country's media environment. In particular, we wished to examine whether politicians view media outlets themselves as being populist and whether media outlets in their country are supportive, or critical of, populist actors. In examining their responses, we sought to identify commonalities and differences in views related to politicians' place on the political spectrum and whether they were in government or in opposition.

Politicians were questioned on their views regarding whether or not leading media outlets were supportive or critical of populism, and if they consider that media outlets themselves behave in a populist manner. Their responses enabled us to understand further details about politicians' perceptions of the relationship between the media and populist politicians, namely, whether populist political actors are in fact covered by the media; whether they believe that the dominant perspective, if there is one, is primarily critical or supportive of political actors in either leading and/or populist media, and the reasons they consider this to be so; and, finally, whether they consider that leading media cover populist actors in a populist way.

Most politicians in most countries reported that populist political actors are indeed covered by the media, with the exception of Bulgaria, where only one centrist opposition politician thought that this was not the case. Asked whether the dominant perspective of this coverage by leading

media outlets was critical, the majority of politicians from Bosnia, Greece, Hungary, Poland, and Romania, and half of the Bulgarian interviewees, considered it to be uncritical. However, in some cases, even if the coverage was considered to be uncritical, it was suggested that it unintentionally works in favor of the populist agenda because of its over-simplified and sensational character, aimed at attracting higher ratings. A variety of reasons were offered for the media's uncritical stance, including economically weak media (Bosnia), a dysfunctional media system (Hungary), the alignment of the media's news values with populist communication (Poland), and political instrumentalization (Bosnia). Most politicians from Denmark, Italy, Poland, Spain, Portugal, and Norway, and half of the Bulgarian interviewees, considered the media to be generally critical of populists. Politicians from Italy and Spain argued that a critical perspective was connected to the capacity of the media to be objective and independent.

Media in Bosnia, Greece, Hungary, Poland, and Romania were considered by politicians from these countries to be supportive of populist political actors. Two main reasons were given by the interviewees for media support. The first was a form of dependency on the political sphere derived from either financial or ideological factors. This reason was emphasized by politicians from more than half of the countries included in our research (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, and Portugal). The other main reason offered for media support, indirect or otherwise, of populist political actors was related to the form, style, and narrative adopted by media outlets so that, according to a Portuguese politician, 'populist political actors make good front pages and headlines that sell', and, according to a Norwegian politician, 'populists fit so well into what is the media's parameters' or, as one Greek politician stated, 'moderation does not sell'.

Among the basic characteristics of media coverage noted by many interviewees is an emphasis on short, catchy, clickbait-type headlines, too much focus on strategy and personalities, and too little on substantive politics (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Denmark, Poland, and Portugal). According to a Polish politician, the media provide a simplified vision of reality using language which bolsters populism—a view also shared by politicians from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy, and Norway. Politicians from Italy were particularly critical of what they thought to be superficial and poor-quality media news coverage. Media support for populist actors was also attributed to the competitive pressure being brought to bear on traditional news outlets by an increasingly fragmented media landscape and fierce competition for audience share (Greece).

Politicians were also explicitly asked whether they believed the media in their country to be populist, or whether mainstream media covered events in a populist way, and, if so, which. A number of interviewees named media outlets they believe to be populist, including politicians from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Poland, Portugal,

Romania, and Spain. In the case of Greece, only the representatives of the two populist parties considered this to be the case. This was also true of Spain. Most of the media named are in private hands; however, in some cases (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, and Poland), public service media were also thought to have adopted a populist style. Every Hungarian politician considered the country's leading media to be populist, including the public service broadcaster which they described as 'government media'. Most politicians from Bulgaria and Spain, on the other hand, reported that they did not believe that there are populist media or that mainstream media cover issues in a populist manner. However, a Spanish politician stated that the media are unwittingly playing the populists' game by over-simplifying the political conversation (for a different approach on factors that promote populism in the media, see Maurer et al. in this volume).

Our findings lead to the following conclusions. Politicians from across Europe, in government or in opposition, and from almost every ideological stripe, regard the media as increasingly adopting, or having already adopted, news values which are populist—understood as over-simplifying and sensationalizing coverage—and therefore contribute to populist politics. Politicians identified with some populist parties, however, do not accept this understanding of populism. In Spain and Portugal, for example, politicians identified with populism from widely diverse ideological families (left-wing in the former case and right-wing in the latter) argue that mainstream media reject populism and that this is a cause for regret. They argue that truly populist media are of the people. In general, however, politicians are concerned that populist—in a negative sense—news coverage is intensifying, while critical and high-quality political coverage, understood as objective and independent reporting, is decreasing.

There is also widespread concern in countries as varied as Denmark and Hungary that the media are either insufficiently critical, utterly uncritical, or supportive of populist actors. A Danish liberal-right counterpart stated that she considers the media to be 'supportive to such an extent that I become furious about it'. Politicians from former communist countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, and Poland) attribute this uncritical and/or supportive stance to the political instrumentalization of the media and clickbait approach to politics, while politicians from Northern and Southern European countries (Denmark, Norway, Italy, Portugal, and Spain) attribute it more to a tabloid approach to politics. However, the outcome is, in their view, similar: reinforcement of the populist agenda with the attendant problematic implications for liberal democracy.

Conclusion

A first noteworthy conclusion is that, although the sample includes countries from different parts of Europe with different experiences of populist politics and varying amounts of electoral success, as well as different types

of populism, there are no clear discernible patterns in these European regions regarding how politicians perceive populism, its consequences, and explanatory reasons, as well as the role of the media in spreading or containing populism. There seems to be some general consensus, however, regarding the issues that are most related to populist approaches to politics in Europe, namely immigration and economic hardship, which are in turn linked more recently to the migration crisis and the financial and economic crises (see also the introduction to this volume).

From among the various results obtained through this study based on interviews, it is interesting to note that charisma is not considered an important component of populism in Europe. Extant literature often relates charisma with crises, presenting the latter as opportunities for charismatic leaders to engage in simple, emotional, political communication that exploits peoples' anxiety and fears and offers straightforward, uncomplicated solutions to problems (e.g., Eatwell, 2004). Regardless, at least as politicians across these different regions in Europe perceive it, the spread of populism in Europe is not linked to the politicians' personal characteristics, and particularly not to charisma.

These politicians have mainly pointed to the malfunctioning and even failure of established democratic institutions, including mainstream political parties, in addressing problems and in producing convincing discourse and solutions as one of the main reasons behind the development of populism in Europe. Alternative political proposals then have a fertile ground upon which to grow and capitalize on existing crises. In fact, our sample of interviewees referred to the migration crisis and the Euro crisis as being the main issues exploited by current populist political actors in Europe.

These politicians have also pointed to broad understandings of populism, from ideology (democracy, left and right) to communication and political style and strategy. But populism is usually perceived as something inherently negative, either because it is based on over-simplified (mis) conceptions of reality, or because it is deliberately intended to deceive. There are, however, some exceptions, especially from populist politicians, that link populism to the roots of democracy (sovereignty of the people) and perceive it as a logical response to an ill-functioning system. It is also noteworthy that the notion 'corrupt elites', often present in definitions of populism, was not emphasized by these politicians, probably as a result of the presence of self-serving bias.

A lingering disillusionment with politics was also presented as an explanation of the success of populist political actors, as well as a negative consequence of populism. Given the perceptions of populism as over-simplification of issues and vain promises, for example, it should be no surprise that citizens would also feel disappointed with populist parties and governments, in addition to being disillusioned with mainstream politics. However, some of the interviewees have also referred to contradictory positive consequences of populism as greater inclusivity

and political engagement. Different types of populism as well as different effects of populist discourse on citizens (for further insight into the effects of populism on citizens, see the theoretical chapter by Hameleers et al. in this volume) might easily explain the contradictory perceptions of the consequences of populism.

The media, both mainstream and social media, are also seen as an important part of the equation by these politicians. Factors such as the instrumentalization of the media by populist governments (e.g., Hungary, Poland) or high market competition and commercialization objectives (identified everywhere) are usually seen as determinants heightening the salience attributed to populist actors and to their messages in political news coverage. Additionally, mainstream media were also seen as responsible for facilitating an environment of over-simplified and distorted political debate, due to some of their news values and personalization (overall tabloidization), which fits perfectly with populist political styles and tends therefore to result in more media exposure for populist political actors. Social media, as a means through which to communicate directly with citizens, bypassing mainstream media gatekeepers, allows a conveyance of non-mediated, user-generated content, and has a great deal of influence on facilitating an environment conducive to increased polarization and to greater levels of populism (see also Salgado, 2018).

In sum, this study of the perceptions politicians hold of populism has shown that, although this sample includes politicians from different types of political parties and countries that have experienced various levels of success of populism as well as different types of populism, there seems to be strong similarity in their views. Populism is mainly perceived as something negative and with damaging consequences for democracy; there is a crisis of political representation and a crisis of democratic values that seem to be opening up space for alternative, and sometimes, extremist, political actors; and the media are not seen as a neutral bystander.

Notes

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4. The political parties included in the study were as follows: Bosnia and Herzegovina: Democratic Front, Serb Democratic Party, Alliance for a Better Future, Independent Block; Bulgaria: Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria, Coalition Patriotic Front, Will, Coalition for Bulgaria; Denmark: Danish People's Party, Venstre (Right-Liberals), Social-Democrats, the Alternative; Greece: To Potami (The River), Nea Dimokratia (New Democracy), Chrysi Avgi (Golden Dawn), Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left); Hungary: Fidesz, Jobbik, Independent, Politics Can Be Different (LMP); Italy: 5 Star Movement, Forza Italia, Democratic Party, Lega Nord; Norway: Conservative Party, Progress Party, Center Party, Socialist Left Party; Poland: Civic Platform, Nowoczesna (Modern), Law and Justice, Democratic Left Alliance; Portugal: Communist Party, National Renewal Party, Socialist Party, Social Democratic Party; Romania: The Democratic Union of the Hungarians in Romania, Social Democratic Party, National Liberal Party, Union Save Romania; Spain: People's Party, Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, Ciudadanos, Podemos. Anonymity was not an issue for most of these politicians, except in the cases of Bulgaria and Poland, where all interviewees have requested that their names not be disclosed.

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Part II

Populism in the Media



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5 Dimensions, Speakers, and Targets

Basic Patterns in European Media Reporting on Populism

Sina Blassnig, Patricia Rodi, Keren Tenenboim-Weinblatt, Kinga Adamczewska, Lilia Raycheva, Sven Engesser, and Frank Esser

Introduction

European media systems have been affected by major changes in the last few decades that have facilitated the dissemination of populist messages, including increased media ownership concentration, increased commercialization, and a stronger orientation towards news values (Esser, Stępińska, & Hopmann, 2017). At the same time, Europe has faced several political crises, such as the European sovereign debt crisis, the refugee crisis, and Brexit. Against this background, we analyze populist communication in immigration news coverage as well as in opinion pieces within two time periods (2016 and 2017) across 12 European countries. We define populism as a ‘thin’ ideology (Mudde, 2004) and derive four dimensions of populist communication: people-centrism, anti-elitism, the exclusion of specific out-groups, and restoring sovereignty (Mény & Surel, 2002; Reinemann, Aalberg, Esser, Strömbäck, & de Vreese, 2017). This chapter provides a theoretical introduction to populist communication in the media and a detailed description of the methodological approach, as well as first descriptive results of the study.

Theoretical Background

Populist Ideology and Populist Communication

Building on Aalberg, Esser, Reinemann, Strömbäck, and de Vreese (2017), we define populism as a ‘thin’ ideology (Mudde, 2004) and follow a ‘communication-centered approach’ to studying populist political communication (Staney, Salgado, & Strömbäck, 2017, p. 354). Thus, we focus on the *content* of populist communication and determine the *degree of populism* in the media by how frequently political actors, journalists, or other actors communicate populist key messages (de Vreese, Esser,

Aalberg, Reinemann, & Stanyer, 2018; Engesser, Fawzi, & Larsson, 2017; Reinemann et al., 2017).

Following on from the three dimensions (people-centrism, anti-elitism, and the exclusion of ‘others’) discussed in the introduction of this volume, we consider an additional dimension in the framework—restoring sovereignty. This is consistent with the idea that ‘populism tries to give power back to the people and restore popular sovereignty. Populists believe that politics should be based on the immediate expression of the general will of the people’ (Abts & Rummens, 2007, p. 408; see also Canovan, 2002; Mény & Surel, 2002; Mudde, 2004). As such, we regard the emphasis on the struggle over sovereignty as a distinct component of populism.

Populist key messages that can be assigned to these four dimensions focus on three target groups. The first is ‘the people’, who are regarded as pure and good and whose empowerment and sovereignty is demanded. Thus, ‘the people’ is mainly the target of positive, advocative populist key messages. Furthermore, ‘the people’ are conceived as a homogenous entity whose common interests, desires, and will need to be vindicated against adversaries who do not belong to ‘the people’. The first of these out-groups, and thus the second target group, is ‘the elite’, which is perceived as corrupt, inept, out of touch with the people, and denied sovereignty. ‘The elite’, which can be the political, economic, juridical, media, scientific, or cultural elite, is target of a vertical differentiation from ‘the people’ and, hence, of negative, conflictive populist key messages. The third target group are ‘the others’, conceived as specific social groups who do not share the people’s ‘good’ characteristics, values, or opinions (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008, p. 3). These out-groups are specific segments of the population who do not comply with the monolithic conception of ‘the people’ and are juxtaposed to the people in terms of needs, origin, ethnicity, citizenship, political rights, etc. Thus, they are subject to a horizontal differentiation or even a ‘downward-oriented social comparison’, since ‘the others’ are often seen as inferior to ‘the people’ (Reinemann et al., 2017, p. 21). ‘The people’, ‘the elite’, and ‘the others’ can all be conceptualized in different ways, for example in political, economic, or cultural terms. Whether ‘the people’ is defined as, for example, ‘sovereign’, ‘class’, ‘nation’, or ‘ethnic group’, also implies who does not belong to ‘the people’ (Reinemann et al., 2017). Consequently, the conceptions of ‘the elite’ and ‘the others’ in populist key messages are expected to be closely related to the notion of ‘the people’.

Figure 5.1 summarizes the relationships between the four dimensions and three target groups of populist communication. Although there is some disagreement about how the different dimensions of populist communication relate to one another and which elements are necessary or sufficient to speak of populism, we argue, in accordance with the conceptualization set out at the outset, that *complete* populist ideology (see also Jagers & Walgrave, 2007) should entail all four dimensions. However,

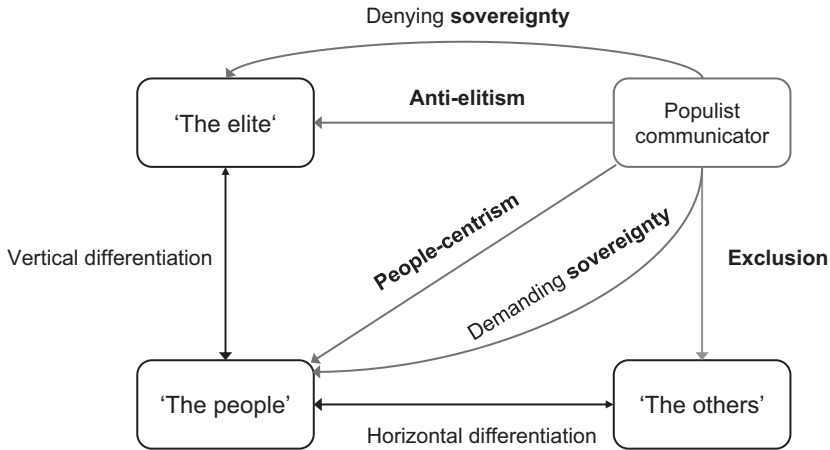


Figure 5.1 Key concepts and messages of populist communication

earlier research has shown that populist ideology is often communicated in a fragmented way, especially in the media (Engesser, Ernst, Esser, & Büchel, 2016). The individual dimensions are likely to be found empirically in different combinations or in varying degrees, indicating different types of populist communication (Reinemann et al., 2017). Thus, we consider populist communication as a combination of these four dimensions, which complement, imply, or even evoke each other (Müller et al., 2017) and empirically manifest in different types of populist communication.

In this chapter, we focus on these four dimensions and three target groups of populist key messages, and thus on the *content* of populist communication. However, as other authors elaborate (de Vreese et al., 2018; Engesser et al., 2017; Wirth et al., 2016), populist ideology or the *content* of populist communication (*what?*) may be supplemented by populist style, which refers to the *form* of populist communication (*how?*). Unlike the ideological or content-related components of populist communication, there is still little consensus on how to define or operationalize populist style. Nevertheless, efforts to systematize populist style elements emphasize the dimensions of negativity, emotionalization, simplification, and sociability (Engesser et al., 2017, see also Maurer et al. in this volume).

Populism in the Media

While classical research literature on political populism (see, e.g., Canovan, 1981; Taggart, 2000) does not mention the media at all, more recent studies have increasingly emphasized the role of the media in

the dissemination of populist messages (see, e.g., Engesser et al., 2017; Hamelaers, Bos, & Vreese, 2017; Müller et al., 2017). From a political communication perspective, the role of the media is crucial to understanding the ubiquity of populist messages, as well as the rise and success of recent populist political actors (Aalberg & de Vreese, 2017).

With regard to populism in editorial content, Esser et al. (2017) distinguish between populism *by* the media and populism *through* the media. Rather simplified, these two perspectives differentiate whether the communicators of populist messages are the media themselves, or political and other actors whose messages are disseminated through the media. The first perspective, *populism by the media*, refers to a media populism that is actively propagated by media organizations or journalists (Esser et al., 2017). Thus, the media may themselves appeal to the people and construct in and out-groups, or promote anti-elitism (Mazzoleni, 2014). This is similar to Krämer's (2014) notion of media populism. The cause can be either a specific journalistic ideology, or an increasing commercialization of the media. The second perspective, *populism through the media*, focuses on the media's provision of a platform for populists, which facilitates the distribution and amplification of populist messages originating from politicians and other actors. This is closely connected to the idea of a (generally unintentional) convergence of goals between the 'production logic' of commercialized media, and that of populist political actors (Esser et al., 2017, p. 369; Mazzoleni, 2008, pp. 54–55). According to this perspective, media logic and news values create a favorable opportunity structure to populist messages that may, in turn, be anticipated and exploited by populist actors (Esser et al., 2017). Thus, intentionally or unintentionally, the media can provide a conducive stage for populism (Mazzoleni, 2014).

Besides these opportunity structures in the media, several factors in the structural and situational context on the macro-level may influence the degree of populist communication in journalistic media, as illustrated in Figure 1.1 in the introduction in this volume (see also Reinemann et al., 2017). For instance, the political, journalistic, and issue culture of a country may affect how the media cover real-world events and politicians' actions and statements, and whether journalists may use populist key messages themselves. Moreover, journalistic media interact with citizens, which—depending on the country—may have varying predispositions, attitudes, opinions, or reality perceptions. On the one hand, this may be the result of media coverage in combination with other context factors. On the other hand, this may also influence news media coverage in a feedback loop. Finally, country-specific context factors, especially situational factors, are expected to change over time. Specific factors that are assumed to influence populist communication in news media across countries, as well as over time, will be elaborated in more detail in the following chapters by Maurer et al. and Esser et al.

This chapter aims to answer four research questions. First, we investigate how the four core dimensions of populist communication are

distributed in news coverage on immigration and in opinion pieces across 12 countries (*RQ1*). Second, we analyze how these core dimensions of populist communication are related to each other empirically (*RQ2*). Third, we seek to discover who the main speakers of populist key messages are (*RQ3*). Finally, we explore how ‘the people’, ‘the elite’, and ‘the others’, who are targeted in populist key messages, are defined across the investigated countries (*RQ4*).

Method

Sample

Our investigation concerning populism in the media includes 12 countries: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Israel, Italy, Norway, Poland, Serbia, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. These countries represent different geographical European areas and differ greatly in terms of structural factors (see the chapter by Maurer et al.) as well as situational factors (see the chapter by Esser et al.) that may influence the relationship between populism and the media. This allows us to analyze the relationship between populism and the media across different contextual settings. For instance, while in Northern Europe populism is typically associated with right-wing populist parties, populism in Southern Europe more often also includes left-wing populism (see also the empirical chapters by Salgado et al. and Stanyer et al.). In Western Europe, research on populism has often focused on populist parties’ influence on long-established mainstream parties. In Central and Eastern European countries, populism has traditionally had a stronger focus on anti-elitism, the fight against corruption, and ethnic or religious minorities as out-groups (Aalberg & de Vreese, 2017), though in the wake of the recent European refugee crisis the focus has been shifting onto immigrants as the primary out-group for many Central and Eastern European countries (Stanley, 2017).

To allow not only for a cross-national comparison but also for a temporal comparison, our study includes two waves.¹ We used two constructed weeks, the first wave from February 22–April 2, 2016, and the second wave from February 20–April 1, 2017. For most countries, these two time periods represent routine time.² These periods were deliberately chosen in order to investigate the exact time frame across all 12 countries, to enhance comparability, as well as to allow for the comparison of situational factors over time (see the chapter by Esser et al.).

For each country, three leading newspapers fulfilling the following criteria were selected: (1) they have a large reach among the audience and agenda-setting power for politicians and other media; (2) they represent both up-market and mass-market journalism; and (3) they represent different political leanings. For all newspapers, the digital version (E-Paper) was obtained for each day of the two constructed weeks (Table 5.1).³

Table 5.1 Media outlets in the sample

<i>Country</i>	<i>Up-market</i>		<i>Mass-market</i>
Bulgaria	24 Chassa	Trud	Telegraph
Czech Republic	Pravo	MF Dnes	Blesk
France	Le Figaro	Le Monde	Le Parisien
Germany	Die Welt	Süddeutsche Zeitung	B.Z.
Greece	Ta Nea	Kathimerini	Efimerida ton Syntakton
Israel	Haaretz	–	Yedioth Aharonoth Israel Hayom
Italy	Il Corriere della Sera	La Repubblica Il Giornale	–
Norway	Aftenposten	Dagsavisen	VG (Verdens gang)
Poland	Gazeta Wyborcza	Rzeczpospolita	Fakt
Serbia	Politika	Večernje novosti	Blic
Switzerland	NZZ	Tages-Anzeiger	Blick
United Kingdom	Telegraph	Guardian	Daily Mail

In selecting the articles, we followed two different sampling strategies. The first sample is based on the topic, while the second sample is based on the story type of an article. Articles that fulfilled the criteria of both sampling strategies were considered for both samples. Table 5.2 summarizes the sample numbers for both sampling strategies as well as for the overlap between the two.

The first sample, henceforth referred to as *immigration news sample*, focuses on articles (both news and commentary) related to the topic of immigration. We have chosen to focus on this topic because it has been described as one of the driving forces for the support for populist parties in Western and Northern Europe (Stanyer et al., 2017). It is particularly vulnerable to exclusionist populist rhetoric and poses a challenge, in particular, to responsible media coverage. Following this sampling strategy, articles were sampled using a search string consisting of words related to immigration, translated into the respective languages. To ensure comparability and functional equivalence, the translation of the search strings was completed with close cooperation between the different country teams, and the search terms were adapted or supplemented for individual countries. All articles which contained at least one of the terms in the respective search strings, were included in this first sampling pool. If this resulted in more than ten articles for an individual newspaper on a given day, a random sample of ten articles was drawn for that day.

Despite its centrality for populism in Europe, the discourse on immigration may be very different and of varying relevance in Northern, Southern,

Table 5.2 Number of news items in samples across waves

	<i>Immigration news sample</i>		<i>Opinion piece sample</i>		<i>Sample overlap</i>				
	<i>Year</i>		<i>Year</i>		<i>Year</i>				
	2016	2017	2016	2017	2016	2017			
Bulgaria	30	13	43	17	16	33	4	0	8
Czech Republic	88	75	163	44	38	82	21	32	53
France	–	58	58	–	39	39	–	9	9
Germany	118	107	225	72	66	138	27	14	41
Greece	144	28	172	92	88	180	40	8	48
Israel	24	38	62	92	58	150	7	10	17
Italy	113	145	258	72	81	153	17	9	26
Norway	83	86	169	66	69	135	19	22	41
Poland	5	6	11	32	17	49	2	2	4
Serbia	31	26	57	42	42	84	4	1	5
Switzerland	125	107	232	59	66	125	26	19	45
United Kingdom	–	73	73	–	52	52	–	17	17
Total	761	762	1523	588	632	1220	167	143	310

Western, and Central-Eastern Europe. With this in mind, we have drawn a second sample. This second sample, henceforth referred to as *opinion piece sample*, is based on the story type or genre of an article and includes all opinion-oriented formats, regardless of their topic. This is grounded in the theoretical notion that interpretative or opinion-oriented journalism may be especially prone to populism (Esser et al., 2017; Hameleers et al., 2017). This sampling pool included all opinion pieces, editorials, columns, and commentaries that were explicitly labeled as such or are distinguished graphically from straight news articles, and which appeared in the following newspaper sections: politics, international politics, national politics, and regional politics. If an individual newspaper contained more than five opinion-oriented articles on a given day, a random sample of five articles was drawn for that day (see Table 5.2).

Operationalization

Populist Key Messages

The most important concept in the conducted content analysis is, of course, populist communication. To measure this, we use an index of populist communication, which is a formative measure (Diamantopoulos, Riefler, & Roth, 2008) consisting of the four dimensions described

above: people-centrism, anti-elitism, restoring sovereignty, and exclusion. Twelve populist key messages, which were defined on theoretical grounds and each correspond to one dimension, were used as indicators. In the operationalization, we initially built on other recent international content analyses on populist communication (Ernst, Engesser, Büchel, Blassnig, & Esser, 2017; Müller et al., 2017; Wirth et al., 2016), which operationalize populist communication using three dimensions: people-centrism, anti-elitism, and restoring sovereignty. In order to attain the agreed upon definition of populism and populist communication in this book (see the introduction to this volume), and based upon the theoretical considerations elaborated above, we extended the existing operationalization with the additional dimension of ‘exclusion’ (see also Engesser et al., 2017). This dimension was operationalized independently for this study at the article level.

Populist Key Messages: People-Centrism

The first dimension—*people-centrism*—consists of four key messages that advocate for the people (Wirth et al., 2016). These key messages all require explicit mention of ‘the people’, which can be defined as the population of a country, those who share a common origin or culture, the citizens in contrast to those who govern them, or those without special rank or position in society. The people may be regarded as nation, ethnos, demos, class, or strata. In this study, we distinguish between political, economic, legal, geographical, cultural, religious, or generalized conceptualizations of ‘the people’.

The people may be addressed as a whole, as a metaphor (‘man on the street’, ‘the common man’), or as a subgroup that is regarded as representing all people. If subgroups are mentioned, it is crucial that *everyone* may consider themselves, at least hypothetically, to be a member of this subgroup (e.g., ‘hardworking people’ or ‘voters’ in contrast to ‘women’ or ‘children’). Residents of a specific geographic area are also treated as the people (e.g., ‘neighbors’, ‘people of London’). Subgroups that are widely regarded as social minorities (e.g., immigrants, criminals) or that express special interests or a specific clientele (e.g., teachers) are not considered to be the people. References to the people can be made through words such as ‘Switzerland’, ‘Britain’, ‘(the) public’, ‘(the) citizen(s)’, ‘(the) voter(s)’, ‘(the) taxpayer(s)’, ‘(the) resident(s)’, ‘(the) consumer(s)’, ‘(the) population’, ‘(the) nation’, etc.

First, a speaker using populist political communication can demonstrate his closeness to the people by *approaching the people*. This means that an actor (e.g., politician, journalist, or other actor) describes his or herself (or is described) as belonging to the people, being close to the people, knowing the people or their needs, speaking for the people, caring for the people, or approaching the people in any other similar way. The

underlying idea of this key message is that the actor claims to represent or embody the people or is seen as representing or embodying the people (Wirth et al., 2016).

Second, by *praising the people's virtues* a speaker may attribute and emphasize positive (personality) traits to the people, or express faith in the people's ability and judgment, such as common sense. For example, the people may be described as good, virtuous, moral, charismatic, credible, intelligent, competent, consistent, considerate, benevolent, etc. This category also applies if the people is cleared of being malevolent, criminal, lazy, stupid, extremist, racist, undemocratic, etc. (Wirth et al., 2016).

Third, an actor can *praise the people's achievements*. Here, in contrast to praising the people's virtues, praising the people's achievements focuses not on how the people is, but on what the people has done. This key message is coded if a positive development, situation, or success is associated with an effort by the people. Achievements include important, successful, or 'right' actions as well as other accomplishments (Wirth et al., 2016).

The fourth people-centrist key message is *describing the people as homogeneous*. This refers to the monolithic conception of the people in a populist worldview and means that the people is seen as sharing a common understanding of the world, common feelings (e.g., 'the people's fears'), common opinions (e.g., approval/disapproval), or a common will (demands, plans, orders to the government, e.g., 'the people's will'). This is in direct contrast with the concept of a fractured, pluralist population of individuals with their own feelings, opinions, and desires, who do disagree on some points (e.g., some people/most of the people/many citizens/57 percent of the people) (Wirth et al., 2016).

Populist Key Messages: Anti-Elitism

The second dimension—*anti-elitism*—combines three key messages that are all conflictive toward the elites (Wirth et al., 2016). Actors can discredit or blame the elite in their communication and, in doing so, detach the elite from the people. 'The elite' is defined as those with the greatest power and influence within a society, especially because of their political power, wealth, or privilege. The elite can be allocated to the areas of politics, administration, economy, law, media, science, and culture. Additionally, the elite can be supranational or general (e.g., 'the powerful ones', 'the ones above', 'the system'). The elite may either be addressed in general terms or by naming specific members of the elite.

The first anti-elitist key message, *discrediting the elite*, stresses negative personality traits, mistakes, and unlawful or immoral behavior of the elites. The elites or their representatives are portrayed as corrupt, evil, incapable, malevolent, criminal, lazy, stupid, undemocratic, etc. The elites, or their representatives, are denied of morality, charisma, credibility, intelligence, competence, consistency, etc. (Wirth et al., 2016).

The second anti-elitist key message, *blaming the elite*, focuses on specific actions of the elite. A speaker may hold the elite responsible or accountable for (or incapable of resolving) an undesirable or harmful situation. Thus, the elites are blamed for a negative development or situation, a specific failure, or a problem (Wirth et al., 2016).

The third anti-elitist key message, *detaching the elite from the people*, requires both the mention of ‘the elite’ and ‘the people’. The elite are described as being detached from the people, as not belonging to the people, not being close to the people, not knowing the people and their needs, not speaking for the people, not caring for the people, not listening to the people, not performing everyday actions, or being distanced from the people in any other way. Ultimately, detaching the elite from the people implies that they do not represent the people (Wirth et al., 2016).

Populist Key Messages: Restoring Sovereignty

The third dimension of populism, *restoring sovereignty*, comprises two key messages (Wirth et al., 2016). On the one hand, an actor may *demand popular sovereignty* in two different ways. First, the speaker attributes power to the people by stating that the people should be able to decide on an issue or that there is a democratic deficit. This means that the speaker argues for general institutional reforms to grant the people more power (i.e., by introducing direct-democratic elements). Second, the speaker may also argue in favor of implementing or enforcing the people’s decisions, for instance after a referendum. On the other hand, an actor can also establish a negative and conflictive approach by *denying the sovereignty of the elite*. Here, the speaker argues in favor of granting less power to the elite within the context of a specific issue (e.g., election, immigration, security) or of general institutional reforms to confine the power of the elite (Wirth et al., 2016).

Populist Key Messages: Exclusion

The fourth dimension, *exclusion*, contains three conflictive key messages towards specific social out-groups framed as ‘the others’. ‘The others’ are defined as population segments that are excluded from ‘the people’ or juxtaposed to them. The others may be addressed as any subgroup, minority, or clientele that does not fall into the category of the people or the elite. Examples of such groups are immigrants, specific ethnic or religious groups, criminals, homosexuals, etc. Similar to anti-elitism, actors, first, may *discredit specific groups* by denouncing, criticizing, and/or stigmatizing them. Thereby, negative personality traits, mistakes, and unlawful or immoral behavior of specific social groups are stressed. Second, actors may *blame specific groups* or hold them responsible for an undesirable or harmful situation or development. Third, actors may *exclude specific groups from the people*. These groups are characterized

as ‘the others’—as not belonging to the people or not sharing their virtues. We distinguish between political, economic, legal, geographical, cultural, and religious conceptualizations of ‘the others’ (see also Cranmer, 2011; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007).

These 12 populist key messages were all measured as dummy variables. For each category, we coded at the story level, whether a given populist key message was present in an article or not—regardless of the speaker. For each dimension of populist communication, a maximum index, i.e., a dummy variable, was calculated, where 1 indicates that at least one of the corresponding key messages was present. For the overall *populism in the media index*, the four dimension indices were summed up, indicating how many of the four dimensions were present for each article. Thus, the populism in the media index is a sum index ranging from 0 to 4. A value of 0 means that the analyzed articles contained no populist key message. A value of 4 would mean that each story analyzed contained key messages from all four dimensions of populism.

Speakers

For each populist key message, we coded whether the speaker was a political actor, a media actor, a citizen, or another actor. A speaker is an actor who was quoted in the news item either directly or indirectly. If a populist statement was made by the actual journalist, the speaker was coded as a media actor. If different speakers within an article voiced the same key message, it was coded for each speaker type.

Inter-Coder Reliability Across Countries

The material was coded by a total of 26 coders. The country teams recruited native speaking coders from the respective countries, whose English proficiency was sufficient to read the codebook in English and to complete the coder training and reliability testing using English-language material. Ensuring a common understanding of a codebook and inter-coder reliability across countries is a major challenge in comparative research (see, e.g., Hopmann, Esser, & de Vreese, 2017; Rössler, 2012). Therefore, we took several steps to ensure inter-coder reliability. First, proceeding from an initial five-day coder training of eight Swiss coders, we conducted several pre-tests, based on which some variable descriptions and definitions were revised and discussed. Second, we conducted a three-day international coder training with a core-team from three countries to ensure and improve the international applicability of the constructs to be measured. Third, we conducted an intensive three-day international coder training with coders from all countries. In a fourth and final step, we formally tested the inter-coder reliability based on English-language material (31 online news articles) before the start of the country-specific coding.

As Table 5.3 clarifies, we report percentage agreement, Brennan and Prediger's Kappa (Brennan & Prediger, 1981), as well as two versions of Fretwurst's *Lotus* (Fretwurst, 2015a, 2015b). The unstandardized *Lotus* can be directly interpreted and represents the percentage agreement of coders with the category most used by all coders. The standardized *Lotus*

Table 5.3 Reliability scores for the content analysis

<i>Type</i>	<i>Variable</i>	<i>% agreement</i>	<i>Brennan & Prediger's K</i>	<i>Lotus</i>	<i>S-Lotus</i>
Formal	Outlet	97	.97	.98	.98
	Author	83	.80	.89	.89
	Political author	97	.96	.97	.97
	Length of article	84	.79	.89	.85
	Story type	77	.73	.84	.83
Topic	Primary topic	72	.70	.82	.81
	Secondary topic	34	.30	.49	.48
	Tertiary topic	56	.54	.71	.7
Populism	Approaching the people	70	.41	.78	.57
	Praising the people's virtues	92	.83	.94	.89
	Praising the people's achievements	97	.94	.98	.96
	Describing the people as homogeneous	71	.41	.79	.58
	Discrediting the elite	61	.22	.71	.42
	Blaming the elite	67	.34	.76	.51
	Detaching the elite from the people	71	.42	.8	.6
	Demanding popular sovereignty	91	.82	.94	.89
	Denying elite sovereignty	99	.98	.99	.99
	Excluding 'others' from the people	79	.57	.85	.71
	Discrediting 'others'	89	.78	.93	.86
	Blaming 'others'	87	.74	.91	.83
	People-centrism (dummy)	67	.35	.76	.53
	Anti-elitism (dummy)	81	.61	.88	.75
	Sovereignty (dummy)	90	.80	.94	.87
Exclusion (dummy)	73	.45	.81	.61	

Styles	Negativity	44	.33	.59	.49
	Negativity (dummy)	68	.52	.81	.62
	Emotional tone	44	.26	.6	.4
	Emotional tone (dummy)	71	.42	.82	.64
	Dramatization	47	.29	.62	.42
	Dramatization (dummy)	64	.27	.78	.57
	Privatization	84	.76	.9	.8
	Polarization	55	.33	.67	.35
	Colloquial language	64	.46	.74	.47
Total	74	.58	.81	.69	

is a chance-corrected version that also takes into account the number of categories used by coders. Brennan and Prediger's Kappa is similar to *S-Lotus* but is based on standard percentage agreement among all coders. Both measures are more robust in assessing the reliability of rare categories and multiple coders than Krippendorff's Alpha and Cohen's Kappa (Hopmann et al., 2017; Quarfoot & Levine, 2016).⁴

With regard to the unstandardized *Lotus*, all variable groups achieved satisfactory inter-coder reliability scores. Only the scores for 'secondary topic' were somewhat lower. The chance-corrected *S-Lotus* scores and Brennan and Prediger's *K* were generally slightly lower. The coding of formal variables still achieved good standardized inter-coder reliability scores. With regard to the topic variables, the reliability of the 'secondary' and 'tertiary' topic was somewhat lower. With regard to the substantive variables to measure populism, the results were still acceptable. However, the results for variables such as 'discrediting the elite', 'blaming the elite', and 'detaching the elite from the people' were slightly lower. This may be partly due to the substantial closeness of these categories, since the reliability improved when the variables were combined into a dummy variable for anti-elitism (*S-Lotus* for anti-elitism = .75). The style variables (except for 'privatization') also achieved lower standardized reliability scores. This was somewhat to be expected due to their evaluative character (see, e.g., Hopmann et al., 2017).

As these scores show, the reliability of our codebook could be further improved. However, we wish to emphasize that the material used for the reliability testing was in English, which was not the native language for most of the coders, while the actual coding of the material was completed in the coders' native language. The choice of English-language material was necessary to compare reliability across all countries. However, reliability tests in a project language typically result in lower reliability scores and, thus, may underestimate the quality of the actual coding (Hopmann et al., 2017; Rössler, 2012).

Results

In this chapter, we concentrate on descriptive results in response to the research questions. First, we provide an initial comparison of the levels of the four dimensions of populist key messages—people-centrism, anti-elitism, sovereignty, and exclusion—across countries. Second, we investigate the relationship between the dimensions. Finally, we compare speakers as well as targets of populist key messages across countries. To ensure comparability and functional equivalence across countries, we conducted most of the following data analyses for the two different samples, separately. However, we draw comparisons between the opinion piece and the immigration news sample where we believe that such comparisons are meaningful. While the following chapter by Maurer et al. will focus solely on the second wave and the chapter by Esser et al. will compare the two waves, in this chapter the data from both waves was combined.

Dimensions of Populism in News Coverage (RQ1)

Let us first look at the overall distribution of populist key messages in the investigated articles. In the opinion piece sample ($N = 1,220$), more than half of all articles (59%, $n = 714$) contained at least one populist key message. Most of these articles contained only one dimension of populist communication (47%, $n = 568$). Around a tenth of articles (11%, $n = 131$) had two dimensions and only around 1% ($n = 15$) included three or all four dimensions. By far the most commonly used dimension of populist communication was anti-elitism, which occurred in about half of all articles (51%, $n = 617$). People-centrism occurred in 14% ($n = 169$), exclusion in 6% ($n = 67$), and sovereignty was almost absent (2%, $n = 23$). In the immigration sample ($N = 1,523$), the distribution of populist key messages showed similarities but also notable differences. While the order of the four dimensions was the same, the proportion of articles that contained at least one populist key message was around 20% lower (40%, $n = 604$). Around a third of all articles contained one dimension of populism (32%, $n = 491$), 6% ($n = 96$) included two dimensions, and 1% contained three or four dimensions ($n = 17$). Thereby, anti-elitist messages appeared in 30% of all articles ($n = 459$) and people-centrism in 9% ($n = 135$). Remarkably, with 8% ($n = 126$), exclusion was the only dimension that occurred more often in the immigration sample than in the opinion piece sample. Finally, key messages related to the sovereignty dimension were, again, only very seldom used (1%, $n = 16$).

In a second step, we compared the levels of populism descriptively across countries. Figure 5.2 compares the extent of the overall *populism in the media index* between the two samples and shows that there is a strong correlation between them ($b = 1.04$, $b = .83$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .65$). This indicates a ‘synchronization’ between news reports and commentary in the sense of Schoenbach (2008). However, the level of populism was lower in the immigration news sample than in the opinion piece sample for all

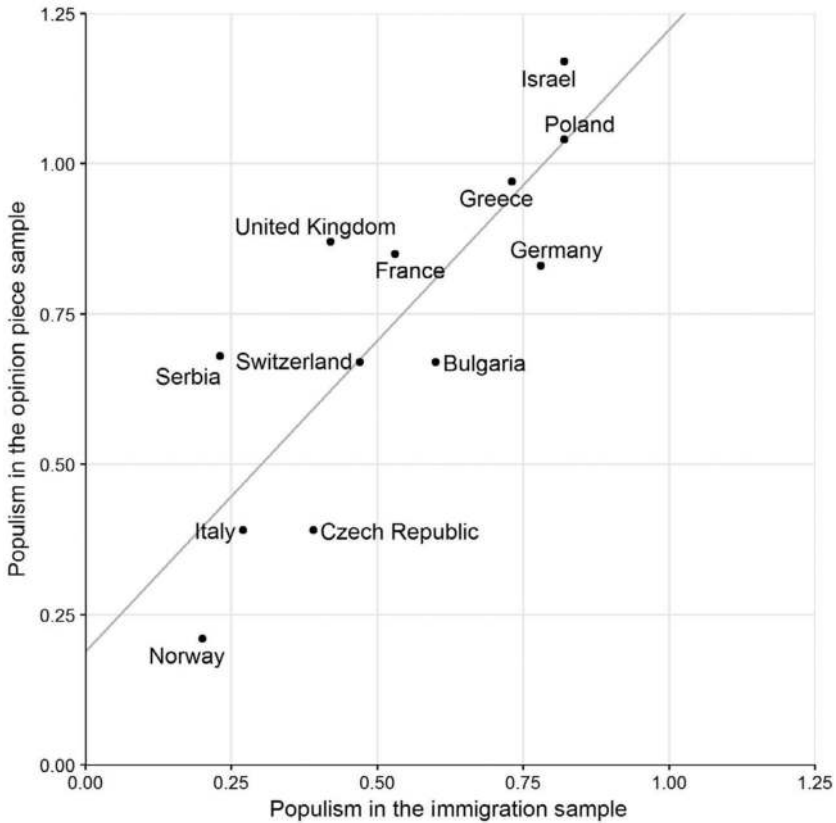


Figure 5.2 Comparison between the two samples relating to the degree of populism expressed by the populism in the media index (values 0–4)

Notes: The gray line depicts a linear regression ($b = 1.04$, $b = .83$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .65$, $N = 12$).

countries, except for the Czech Republic, which showed the same level of populism across both samples (39%).

For both samples, the highest levels of populism were found in Israel and Poland, and the lowest levels in Norway. In relation to Poland, however, we have to bear in mind that with 49 opinion pieces and only 11 articles on immigration, its results were based on the smallest sample among the countries.⁵ When we compare the two samples relating to the country order, Germany, Bulgaria, Switzerland, and the Czech Republic were ranked higher in the immigration news sample compared to the opinion piece sample, whereas Greece, France, the United Kingdom, and Serbia were ranked lower.

Figure 5.3 displays the distribution of the four dimensions of populist communication across countries for the two samples. In both samples and

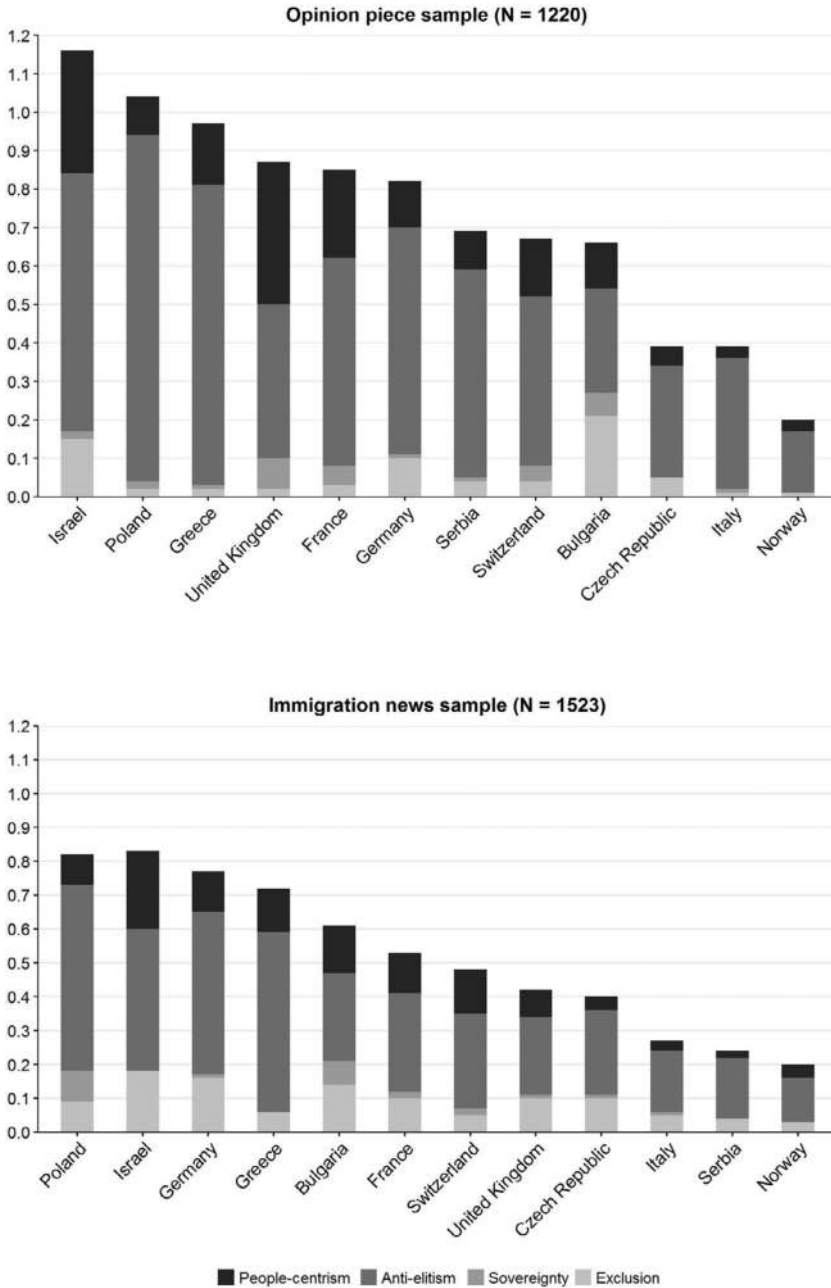


Figure 5.3 The four dimensions of populist communication in opinion pieces and immigration news across countries

Notes: The y-axis reports mean values of indicators per dimension (0–1) which correspond to the share of articles that contain the respective dimension. The four dimensions add up to the populism in the media index (0–4).

across all countries, anti-elitism was the most prominent dimension of populist communication, mostly followed by people-centrism, although some differences, which will be discussed in more detail below, could be identified between countries.

Populism in opinion pieces appeared to be mostly driven by anti-elitism. This applied especially to Poland and Greece, whereas in Bulgaria and Norway, commentaries were least anti-elitist. A more people-centrist populist rhetoric was found in commentaries in the United Kingdom, France, and Israel. In these three countries, between 20% and 40% of opinion pieces included people-centrist key messages, while in Italy and Norway it was less than 5%. Bulgaria was the only country with a more exclusionist than people-centrist rhetoric in opinion-oriented articles. In Germany and Israel, the levels of exclusion were also high, at 10% and 15% respectively. In the remaining countries, less than 5% of opinion pieces contained exclusionist key messages. Sovereignty was below 5% across all countries except for the United Kingdom where, at 8%, it surpassed exclusion. Israel exhibited the most complete populist communication with relatively high levels in all dimensions.

Similar to opinion pieces, populist communication in immigration news was largely dominated by anti-elitism. Again, the media conveyed most anti-elitist messages in Poland and Greece, followed by Israel and Germany. Immigration news was least anti-elitist in Norway, followed by Serbia, where anti-elitism was distinctly lower in comparison to opinion pieces. People-centrism in immigration news was highest in Israel, trailed by Bulgaria, Greece, and Switzerland. The levels of people-centrism in the United Kingdom, which were the highest in the opinion piece sample, were notably lower in the immigration sample. A similar tendency was found for France. Although articles on immigration seemed to be overall less populist than opinion pieces, they contained more exclusionist key messages, especially in Israel, Germany, and Bulgaria. In the United Kingdom, the Czech Republic, Italy, and Serbia, exclusionist key messages appeared more often than people-centrist key messages. As in the opinion piece sample, Israel displayed the most complete populist communication, except for the absence of the sovereignty dimension.

Relationship Between the Dimensions of Populist Communication (RQ2)

As we elaborated in the theory and methods, we conceive of populist communication as a formative concept based on four dimensions which complement each other. However, the question remains about how these four dimensions relate to each other empirically. In response to the second research question, we investigated these relationships in our data.

On the story level, almost all bivariate correlations between the four dimensions were significantly positive in both samples (see Table 5.4).

Table 5.4 Bivariate correlations between dimensions of populist communication on the story level

	<i>People-centrism</i>		<i>Anti-elitism</i>		<i>Sovereignty</i>		<i>Exclusion</i>	
	<i>Opinion</i>	<i>Immigr.</i>	<i>Opinion</i>	<i>Immigr.</i>	<i>Opinion</i>	<i>Immigr.</i>	<i>Opinion</i>	<i>Immigr.</i>
People-centrism	1	1						
Anti-elitism	.07*	.12*						
Sovereignty	.12**	.06*						
Exclusion	.06*	.12*						
			.07*	.12**	.12**	.06*	.06*	.12*
			1	1	.08**	.02	-.01	.06*
			.08**	.02	1	1	.02	.06*
			-.01	.06*	.02	.06*	1	1

Notes: * $p < .05$, ** $p < 0.01$, opinion piece sample: $N = 1,220$, immigration sample: $N = 1,523$.

However, what we are even more interested in is the correlation of these dimensions on an aggregated level. This allows us to compare the relationship between dimensions across countries.

Figure 5.4 illustrates the relationship between the first two dimensions, people-centrism and anti-elitism, across the 12 countries in the immigration news sample. As the figure shows, there was a curvilinear relationship between the two dimensions ($R^2 = .54, p < .05$). Thus, higher levels of people-centrism in the media did not necessarily lead to higher levels of anti-elitism, and vice versa. There were some countries, for example Greece and Poland, with high levels of anti-elitism but comparatively low levels of people-centrism. Other countries, such as Norway, Italy, and the Czech Republic, were low on both dimensions. Finally, some countries had moderate to high levels of both people-centrism and anti-elitism. Among those were, for example, Israel, Switzerland, and France.

Figure 5.5 analogously depicts the relationship between people-centrism and exclusion in the immigration sample. Different to its relationship with anti-elitism, people-centrism rather had a linear relationship with exclusion ($b = 0.88, p < .001, R^2 = .45, p < .01$). Hence, the more people-centrist

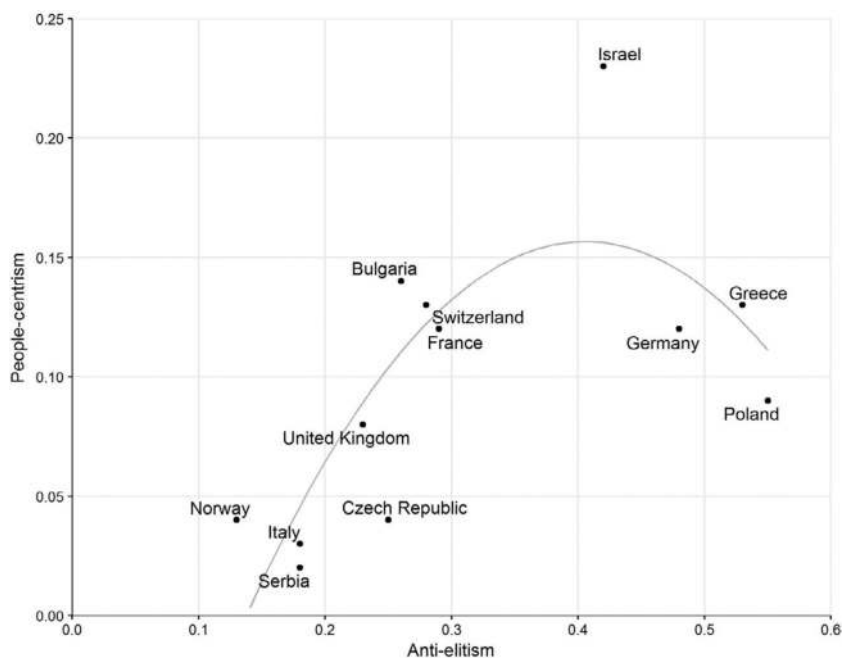


Figure 5.4 Immigration sample: Relation between people-centrism and anti-elitism
Notes: Values represent country means of indicators per dimension (0–1) which correspond to the share of articles that contain the respective dimension.

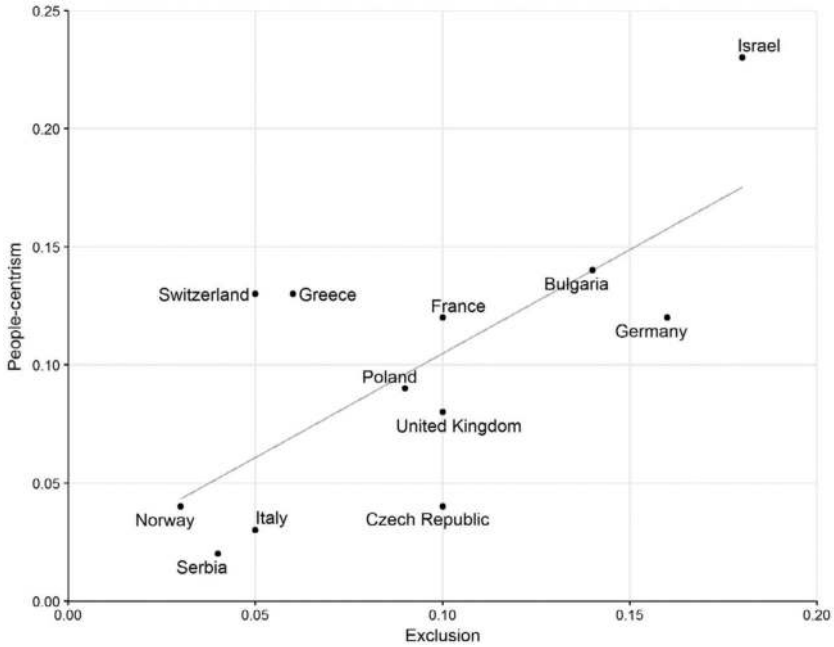


Figure 5.5 Immigration sample: Relationship between people-centrism and exclusion

Notes: Values represent country means of indicators per dimension (0–1) which correspond to the share of articles that contain the respective dimension.

news on immigration in a country, the more exclusionist key messages it contained.

Finally, Figure 5.6 compares the extent of anti-elitism and exclusion across countries in the immigration sample. Similar to people-centrism and anti-elitism, a curvilinear relation was found ($R^2 = .46, p < .05$). This implies that more anti-elitism does not always lead to higher levels of exclusion. Rather, with regard to immigration coverage, there were some countries where the target of populist key messages was rather the elite (e.g., Poland and Greece), whereas in other countries ‘the others’ were more often the target (e.g., Israel, Germany, and Bulgaria). However, it must be kept in mind that in all countries the level of anti-elitism was much higher than the levels of exclusion and people-centrism. Thus, the scales in Figures 5.4–5.6 were adapted to the empirical maximum of the three dimensions to better illustrate the relationship between them.

In summary, the relationships between the three dimensions, people-centrism, anti-elitism, and exclusion in the immigration sample, indicate that only people-centrism and exclusion correlated linearly, while there

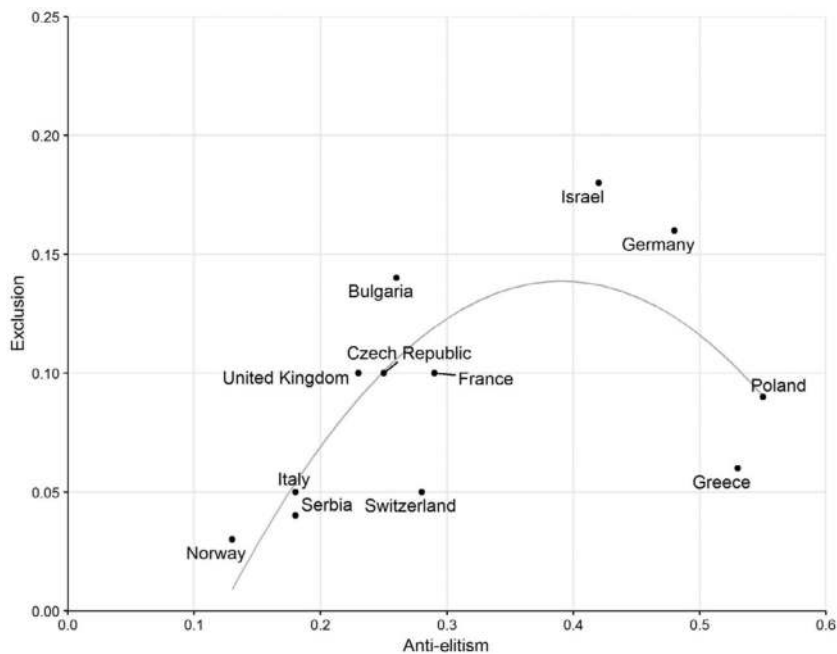


Figure 5.6 Immigration sample: Relationship between anti-elitism and exclusion
 Notes: Values represent country means of indicators per dimension (0–1) which correspond to the share of articles that contain the respective dimension.

was a curvilinear relationship between anti-elitism and the other two dimensions. The same tendencies could be identified for the opinion piece sample; however, there the relationships were not statistically significant. Thus, people-centrism, anti-elitism, and exclusion were more clearly related in news on immigration than in opinion pieces. Furthermore, relationships with the additional dimension of populist communication, sovereignty, were not included since, due to the low case numbers, no patterns of relationship could be identified.

Comparison of Speakers (RQ3)

As explained in the theoretical section, it is relevant to determine who the originators of populist key messages are. From a theoretical perspective, the most important distinction is whether the speakers of populist key messages are journalists themselves, or politicians who are quoted in the articles. Journalists ($n = 856$, 64.9% of articles with populist key messages) and politicians ($n = 384$, 29.1%) were also, empirically, the two most important speaker categories across all investigated countries and

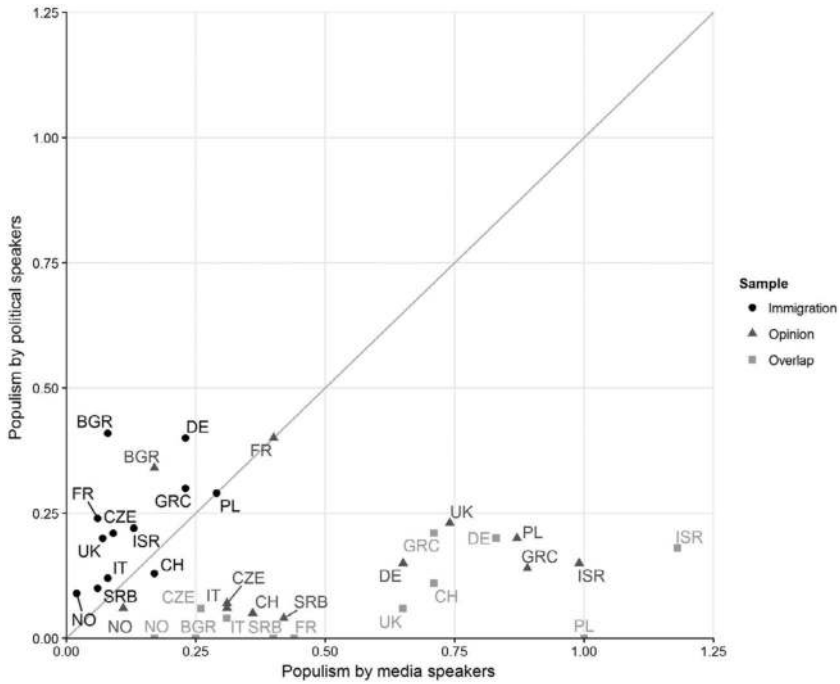


Figure 5.7 Comparison of political and media speakers expressed by the populism in the media index

Notes: Values represent country means of the populism in the media index (0–4) per speaker type.

both samples. Figure 5.7 compares the average extent of populist communication by political speakers and media speakers per country between samples. In contrast to the earlier figures, the samples were distinguished into three groups: articles that only belong to the immigration sample (circle shape), articles that only belong to the opinion sample (square shape), and articles that are part of both samples (i.e., opinion pieces on the topic of immigration; triangle shape). We made this additional distinction here because earlier research implies that those voicing populist messages may be different for opinion-oriented and straight news (Blassnig, Ernst, Büchel, Engesser, & Esser, 2018; Hameleers et al., 2017). Analogous to the overall populism in the media index, the two indices for political speaker and media speaker are sum indices of dummy variables for the four dimensions (0–4). Thus, the x-axis shows the extent of populist communication by media speakers and the y-axis the extent of populist communication by political speakers, both aggregated on the country-level per sub-sample. The solid line represents how the distribution would

look if there were a perfect linear relationship between the speaker types and, thus, a one-to-one ratio. Data points that are plotted below the solid line have more populist key messages by media speakers than by political speakers, and for data points above the solid line, the opposite is true.

As Figure 5.7 reveals, across all countries, news articles on immigration exhibited higher levels of populism by political speakers, whereas opinion pieces (regardless of the topic) displayed higher levels of populism by media speakers. There were two exceptions: In Bulgaria, opinion pieces had higher levels of populism by political speakers, and in Switzerland, news articles on immigration had higher levels of populism by media speakers. In Polish immigration news and French opinion pieces, the ratio between political and media speakers was one-to-one. Thus, populism by journalists was higher in opinion-oriented pieces ($M = 0.56$, $SD = 0.67$) than in immigration news ($M = 0.13$, $SD = 0.37$, $F = 410.64$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .13$), while news articles on immigration were more dominated by populism by political speakers ($M = 0.21$, $SD = 0.47$) than opinion pieces ($M = 0.12$, $SD = 0.35$, $F = 33.77$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .012$). This seems reasonable and in line with theoretical expectations as well as with other recent studies (Blassnig et al., 2018; Hameleers et al., 2017).

Comparison of Targets (RQ4)

Finally, to answer RQ4, we compared the three target groups of populist communication across the analyzed countries: ‘the elite’, ‘the people’, and ‘the others’. For each populist key message, which had to be aimed at one or two of these target groups, we coded how these groups were defined. Hereafter, we discuss how the elite, the people, and the others were conceptualized in the analyzed articles across countries. In contrast to the previous analyses, we did not differentiate between the two samples. On one hand, this was due to low case numbers for the individual target groups. On the other hand, similar patterns could be identified for both samples.

Firstly, across all countries, the most prominently targeted elite of populist key messages was the political elite (on average in 78%, $n = 840$, of all articles containing ‘the elite’ as target of populist key messages, $n = 1079$). This was followed by the supranational elite (11%, $n = 121$), which in most cases will be the European Union. All other elites were attacked considerably less often (in less than 10%).

Secondly, ‘the people’, who are typically the target of positive and advocative populist key messages, were mostly addressed in a generalized or unspecific manner (on average in 49%, $n = 237$, of all articles containing key messages targeting the people, $n = 484$). This was followed by a political notion of the people (27%, $n = 129$), which describes the people in their political function within society, e.g., as voters, electorate, taxpayers, or citizens. However, a geographical conception of the people was more common in Norway, Switzerland, the Czech Republic, and France.

This implies an emphasis on national borders and foreigners. Legal (e.g., ‘law-abiding), economic (e.g., ‘hardworking), religious (e.g., ‘Christians’), or cultural (e.g., ‘occidental’) definitions of the people were found in less than 10% of all articles that contained ‘the people’ as a target for populist key messages.

Conceptualizations of ‘the others’ are, in theory, closely related to conceptions of ‘the people’. Therefore, ‘the others’ can be differentiated into the same subgroups. However, as the others are, by definition, a specific social group, they cannot be ‘general or unspecified’. While exclusion of others is generally low across all countries, there were differences in how ‘the others’ were defined. Similar to ‘the people’, ‘the others’ were most often defined in a political manner (on average in 40%, $n = 77$, of all articles containing key messages targeting ‘the others’, $n = 139$), which refers to persons within their own country who are not legal citizens or who are excluded from the political function of the people (e.g., non-citizens). Exceptions were Israel and Bulgaria, where cultural (e.g., ‘oriental’) or religious (e.g., ‘Muslims’) conceptualizations of ‘the others’ were more important, as well as France, where ‘the others’ were mostly defined in geographical terms (e.g., ‘foreigners’). Economic (e.g., ‘the poor’) or legal (e.g., ‘criminals’) reasons for the exclusion of ‘others’ were very seldom found.

Some connections between the conceptualization of ‘the people’ and the ‘others’ could be identified. This was most noticeable in relation to the importance of religious aspects in Israel and Poland, as well as cultural aspects in Israel and Bulgaria. However, there were also notable differences. For example, religion played a more important role in the definition of ‘others’ than of ‘the people’ in most countries, whereas economic differentiations were more relevant for ‘the people’ than ‘the others’. Finally, which elite was targeted did not seem to be directly related to how ‘the people’ or ‘the others’ were defined. Rather, the political elite was the main focus of anti-elitism in all countries.

Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to introduce the theoretical background for the analysis of populism in the media, as well as to provide a detailed description of the method of the international content analysis of immigration news and opinion pieces in print media across 12 countries and two waves. Furthermore, this chapter presented first descriptive results regarding the four dimensions of populist communication (*RQ1*), their relationship (*RQ2*), speakers (*RQ3*), and targets (*RQ4*) across countries as well as across both samples.

Overall, the news media included populist key messages to the highest extent in Israel and Poland and lowest extent in Norway. While in some countries populist communication seemed to be more common

in opinion pieces (United Kingdom, France, Serbia), in other countries populism seemed to be more specific to immigration news coverage (Germany, Bulgaria, Czech Republic). However, opinion pieces had a higher tendency to be populist than immigration news across all countries. This may be explained by the fact that in straight news articles, journalists follow professional norms, such as objectivity, more strictly than in opinion pieces, which may have a generally more polemic nature and where the media may be more critical towards the establishment and advocate more on behalf of the people (Blassnig et al., 2018; Esser et al., 2017; Hameleers et al., 2017). Moreover, news on immigration contained more exclusionist key messages. This confirms the theoretical expectations that the topic of immigration is particularly vulnerable to exclusionist populist rhetoric.

With regard to the first research question, the descriptive results showed similarities as well as notable differences across countries. In all countries, of the four dimensions of populism, news media mostly conveyed anti-elitism in their articles and commentaries. However, since it is very difficult to draw a clear distinction between populist and ‘normal’ elite criticism, these high levels of anti-elitism need to be interpreted with some caution. Although we would argue that blaming, discrediting, or detaching the elite from the people, as defined in our operationalization, provides a fertile ground for populism by itself, only in combination with the other dimensions does it represent complete populism.

In Greek, Polish, and German media especially, an anti-elitist populism prevailed. In Greece and Poland, besides the generalized ‘government’, this anti-elitism was also often addressed towards the supranational or media elite respectively. This may be attributable to the strong populist parties in these countries. However, since in both countries populist actors were in government at the time, some anti-elitist critique may have also been directed at them. Germany was also among the countries with the highest levels of excluding key messages in the media (together with Israel and Bulgaria). While this may partly be explained by the recent rise of the populist right-wing party AfD, it was mostly due to the frequent, and to some extent, innocuous juxtaposition of refugees and the populace in the press, given that Germany was the main host country for Syrian refugees. In Bulgaria, this can be related to the nationalist parties whose populist rhetoric has intensified specifically with regard to the topic of immigration, expressing discontent both with European immigration policies as well as with Bulgarian authorities (Raycheva, 2017). Israeli news media exhibited the most complete form of populism, with relatively high levels of all four dimensions. On the one hand, this was surprising since, unlike most countries in the sample, Israel does not have political parties commonly known to be populist. On the other hand, this can be explained by the deep social cleavages in Israeli society and the ongoing struggles over the very definition of ‘the people’, which make populist rhetoric

ubiquitous across the political spectrum (Weiss Yaniv & Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2017).

However, in other countries such as Switzerland, Bulgaria, and France, the media included moderate to high levels of populist communication on all four dimensions. Journalists were the least likely to incorporate populism into articles or commentaries in Norway, Serbia, and Italy. Mostly with regard to the latter, this was rather surprising given that in Italy, populist parties have been on the rise for some time (Bobba & Legnante, 2017). However, this may be due to several high-level political events (constitutional reform, resignation of the prime minister, appointment of new government) that may have shifted the media's attention (see also the chapter by Esser et al. in this volume).

In response to the second research question, we found significant correlations among the four dimensions on the story level. On an aggregated level, related to the findings already summarized, we identified a curvilinear relationship between people-centrism and anti-elitism as well as between anti-elitism and exclusion. Thus, in some countries the media seemed to display a more people-centrist populism, while in other countries populism in the media was more anti-elitist or exclusionist. People-centrism and exclusion, in contrast, had a linear relation, indicating that higher levels of people-centrism were associated with higher levels of exclusion in the media. This implies that the media may contribute to the construction of an antagonism between in- and out-groups.

With regard to the speakers, the descriptive analysis showed that in opinion pieces, journalists mostly communicated populist key messages themselves, while they predominantly cited populist key messages by political speakers in straight news on immigration. Thus, populism *by* the media may most likely be identified in opinion-oriented media formats, while populism *through* the media is more common in straight news. However, one must also keep in mind that populist statements by political actors must pass the editorial gates and are thus subject to journalistic selection.

Finally, with regard to the target groups of populist communication, a first descriptive glance showed that while journalists or politicians conceptualized 'the people' mostly in a generalized or unspecific manner, they defined 'the elite' and 'the others' most often in political terms. This indicates a more general form of populism, defining the people as 'sovereign', that can be applied across the whole political spectrum (Kriesi, 2014). Moreover, we could not confirm that the conceptualizations of the three target groups were as closely connected empirically as was theoretically implied. We also identified certain differences that may be explained by the country-specific context. This applied, for example, to Israel, Poland, and Bulgaria, where cultural and religious notions of 'the people' and 'the others' seemed to be more important. This can be attributed to the strong position of the Catholic Church in Poland, of the Eastern Orthodox

Church in Bulgaria, as well as the specific role of the Roma as minority. In Israel, this can be related to the conflict between different religious and ethnic groups, most notably between the Jewish and Arab population, but also within Jewish society (e.g., ultra-Orthodox Jews are often cast as ‘the others’).

As with any investigation, this study has certain limitations. First, while we conducted a comparative analysis in 12 countries across four different European regions, our country selection and, thus, our scope are limited. Second, within these countries we only analyzed a limited sample of print news outlets. Thus, our findings cannot be generalized to other mass media channels, online platforms, or social media platforms. Third, while we believe that our two sampling strategies complement each other, we only looked at certain story types, respectively certain issues. Thus, our findings may be specific to the respective news cultures in relation to opinion-oriented journalism as well as the specific issue cultures with regard to the topic of immigration. However, this can also be used as a strength in terms of the analysis, as the following chapters by Maurer et al. and Esser et al. will demonstrate. Nevertheless, our sampling strategies may have led to some bias, as the large differences in sample sizes between countries indicates. For instance, in countries where immigration is not a continuously heated issue on the political and media agenda (e.g., Israel, Poland), the sample of two constructed weeks of immigration news may not be representative of populist communication in these countries. However, the opinion piece sample, which often corroborated the patterns found in the immigration sample, helped to offset this limitation. Finally, so far we have not analyzed how the populist key messages were presented in the media. While news media may neutrally disseminate such messages based on criteria such as newsworthiness or objectivity, they may also challenge populist messages; for example, responding to anti-elitism directed at the media or to expose populism as a threat to democracy (Wettstein, Esser, Schulz, Wirz, & Wirth, 2018). In contrast, journalists could also provide a favorable setting for populist messages by reinforcing or legitimizing them. This important aspect for the interpretation of the extent of populism in the media across countries was not addressed in this first descriptive analysis.

This chapter provides the basis for the next two chapters. Thus, the following chapters build on the definition of populist communication, the conceptual framework, and the described methodological approach. While the data analysis in this chapter has remained descriptive, the chapter by Maurer et al. takes a more explanatory approach and tries to identify specific factors that explain differences in the levels of populist communication and its dimensions across countries and media outlets. The chapter by Esser et al. will then focus on a temporal perspective and try to understand the influence of situational factors by comparing differences in populism in the media between the two time waves.

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Notes

1. For two countries, France and the United Kingdom, only the second wave in 2017 was obtained. These two countries will therefore not be included in temporal comparisons.
2. Exceptions were France (where national presidential elections took place on April 23 and May 7, 2017) and Bulgaria (where national parliamentary elections took place on March 26, 2017).
3. In Greece, Israel, and Bulgaria, where the digital versions were not obtainable, the newspapers were gathered in print.
4. For a good summary of *Lotus*'s advantages and an example of its application for international comparative content analysis, see also Hopmann et al. (2017).
5. There are two reasons for this: First, national policy issues were of higher relevance in Poland than the international immigration crisis. Second, the distinction between opinion-oriented and straight news format is not as straightforward in Poland as it is in other countries.

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6 Journalistic Culture, Editorial Mission, and News Logic

Explaining the Factors Behind the Use of Populism in European Media

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Introduction¹

Against the background of the variation in populism between countries exposed in the previous chapter by Blassnig et al., this chapter will focus on article, newspaper, and country-level explanatory factors for this variation. Evidence for between-newspaper variation with respect to populist communication has already been presented elsewhere (Manucci & Weber, 2017; Rooduijn, 2014; Wettstein, Esser, Schulz, Wirz, & Wirth, 2018). The role of the press in a political climate of intensifying conflict among European democracies, especially in relation to financial bailouts for EU Member States and the EU's response to migration pressure, to name a few, has been criticized (Sarikakis, 2012). For instance, Tomov and Raycheva (2018) assert that for Bulgaria, populist messages are widely disseminated in the media, especially during the migrant crisis and periods of instability. They conclude that the media disseminate populist messages without the necessary criticism, not seeking different points of view on the subject. Due to the emergence and establishment of populist parties in the political field of virtually all European democracies, political communicators from across the political spectrum might cultivate a populist discourse in the public sphere, which would then also be reflected in the degree of populism in newspapers.

Furthermore, existing theoretical accounts of populism and the media have suggested that we must distinguish between two forms of populist discourse in media coverage: First, populist messages stemming from political actors who communicate through the media, thereby using the

media as a communication channel for their ideas, and, second, populism voiced by media actors themselves. For the former, Esser, Stepińska, and Hopmann (2017) have coined the term ‘populism through the media’, and for the latter, ‘populism by the media’. Mazzoleni (2008) has argued that we can speak of ‘media populism’ when journalists create populist messages themselves—and thus become much more proactive than merely transmitting the populist statements of political actors.

The aim of this chapter is to explore the weight of factors that may help us to explain varying levels of populist communication within and between countries and newspapers, such as journalistic culture of a country, editorial mission of a medium, or style of an article. We work with the same content analysis data as already presented in the previous chapter by Blassnig et al. However, we will limit ourselves to the spring 2017 data (and leave aside the spring 2016 data) because we had a slightly larger number of countries. The following analyses are based on 762 news stories and 632 opinion pieces published in 34 newspapers from ten Western and Eastern European countries between February and April 2017. For more information on the type of stories and newspapers analyzed, and for more information on the operationalization of populism and exact methodical approach, refer to the detailed information given in the preceding chapter of this book.

Theoretical Background

Potential Factors Influencing Populism in the News Media

While scholars have theorized about populism and the media (Mazzoleni, 2003, 2007; Esser et al., 2017; Krämer, 2014), empirical investigations into the impact of factors that could potentially explain the proportion of populist statements in media coverage have remained rare. Furthermore, such studies have concentrated on relatively few variables. For instance, while several have dwelled on the difference between tabloids and broadsheets, hardly any studies considered additional factors such as the political leaning of a medium, the journalistic culture in a country, or characteristics of a news story (Akkerman, 2011; Bos, van den Brug, & de Vreese, 2010; Manucci & Weber, 2017; Rooduijn, 2014; Raycheva & Peicheva, 2017). Building on previous work, the present analysis includes explanatory variables at three levels of analysis—countries, news outlets, and articles—to provide a more comprehensive account of what causes variation in the degree of populism in media coverage (see also the introduction to this book).

In the following, we first identify different influencing variables based on three theoretical perspectives. We then develop and subsequently test our hypotheses using correlation analyses and multi-level regression analyses.

Country-Level: Journalistic Culture (Macro-Level)

The first macro-level variable we wish to consider here is the journalistic culture in a country. Mass-mediated populist messages selected or produced by journalists might be favored by the media's built-in antagonism to political elites, which sometimes even borders on cynicism (Esser et al., 2017; Brants, de Vreese, Möller, & van Praag, 2010). According to this line of argument, an adversarial attitude of journalists towards political elites and their corresponding drive to behave as advocates of the common people would produce an anti-establishment bias in the news. A general cynical attitude towards political actors could make journalists more open to using populist messages, especially during crises. As a counter-argument one could offer the alternative view that the media in many countries serve more as a guard dog (than a watchdog) of the ruling political and economic order and should therefore be regarded as part of the establishment itself—even if they may still occasionally criticize individual representatives of the elite (Donohue, Tichenor, & Olien, 1995)—an argument also often put forward by political actors who criticize the media as part of 'the system'. According to this alternative view, we would expect the media to carry *few populist messages*. High degrees of anti-elitism would be particularly unusual since, in this perspective, the elite is generally backed, not blamed. In any case, the orientation of the media towards political actors cannot be treated as a side issue when it comes to analyzing populism. This orientation is reflected in journalistic cultures acting at the national level (Hanitzsch et al., 2011).

Journalistic culture is thus among the macro-level variables that could account for different levels of populism in the media. Next to political coverage, institutional role conceptions, and especially the self-perceptions of political reporters, are an important component of journalistic culture. They define the journalists' primordial professional goals. In other words, role conceptions condition journalists' approaches to covering politics and thus influence their style of reporting. Comparative studies have identified key differences in the impact of journalists' role conceptions in the media systems of European democracies (Pfetsch, Maurer, Mayerhöffer, & Moring, 2014). Journalists' self-perceptions of their role can oscillate between (1) adversarial and (2) monitorial, or even supportive/collaborative roles in their relationship to political actors, and between (3) pedagogical-ethical and (4) market-oriented roles in their relationship to the public. In political journalism especially, the question about which is the dominant role conception affects the way news stories and opinion pieces are written, including the decision about if and what populist messages should be included in news coverage.

In particular, the predominance of adversarial, collaborative, pedagogical, and market-oriented role conceptions in a country can be expected to influence the relationship of the media and the political elite and, by implication, the consideration of populist discourse in news stories written by journalists. These four roles correspond to the interventionism, power distance, and

market orientation dimensions of journalism culture (Hanitzsch, 2011). First, a collaborative role conception pushes journalists to act as an extension of political parties, which indicates low power distance. For instance, a journalistic culture that sees high value in supporting political institutions will hardly produce media that critically scrutinize or openly repudiate politicians' statements. Rather, one can expect the media to include large parts of official political statements, relatively unfiltered and unquestioned, in their reporting. This allows us to formulate our first hypothesis:

The more dominant collaborative and supportive role conceptions are in the political journalism of a certain country, the more 'populism through the media' we can expect in news stories (H1a).

Notwithstanding the argument above, a collaborative role orientation can also lead journalists to a critical attitude toward populist parties and their messages if established political forces are resolutely 'anti-populist'. Thus, since leading media are usually on the side of established parties, they tend to criticize populist parties and try to reserve the public sphere for their allies' messages. This behavior entails blocking populist messages, at least when they come from new challengers, with the aim to help the non-populist parties. Therefore, the first hypothesis might be dependent on the strength of political parallelism between non-populist, established parties and leading media.

Journalists who are less willing to convey the arguments and adopt the frames put forward by political elites can be expected to be more distant and often more adversarial toward political power. They tend to embrace a watchdog role rather than the role of disseminator of politicians' messages. Such a journalistic culture at times pushes journalists to hold political elites publicly accountable, which can mean to admonish and reprimand them or their policies in articles that express the journalist's own voice. Therefore, we can formulate a second hypothesis, especially pertaining to opinion pieces:

The more deeply entrenched adversarial role conceptions are in the culture of political journalism of a certain country, the more 'populism of the media' we can expect in opinion pieces (H1b).

On the other hand, in journalistic cultures characterized by a strong influence of pedagogical role perceptions, journalists see themselves as educators, guardians, and conveyers of certain values. Those journalists score highly on the interventionism dimension since they pursue a particular mission. Most often, these are liberal values such as tolerance, appreciation of ethnic diversity, and cosmopolitanism. These views are not in line with major parts of populist thought and with communication that focuses on national identity, the (native) people, and their delineation from out-groups. Hence, journalists adopting a pedagogical role are

expected to filter out populist communications by sources, or to contextualize them in line with a social-responsibility ideal of journalism, and to be careful to avoid any populist discourse themselves.

This gate-keeping process may reduce the level of populism that political actors can infuse into media coverage compared to countries with a less pedagogical, more collaborative, or adversarial journalistic culture. Hence, we expect:

The more dominant pedagogical role conceptions are in a country, the less likely journalists will be to include populist communication elements in news stories and opinion pieces (H1c).

Last but not least, a strong drive in journalistic culture to accommodate the taste of the target-audience—in other words, the enhanced goal to produce stories that elicit broad interest and attention and ‘sell’—could render journalists more likely to allow populist statements to slip into their coverage. This is known as a market-oriented role perception. This understanding of the journalistic role has become even more tempting in the online age where media strive to attract views and clicks with hyped-up headlines and provocative story leads. So, if the political journalists in a country as a group have internalized a strong audience orientation as a professional leitmotif, there is a high chance that the media will display an enhanced degree of populist communication in news stories and opinion pieces, given that the elements of populism usually attract eyeballs. From this follows our fourth hypothesis:

The more dominant market-oriented role conceptions are, the more populist communication journalists will include in news articles and opinion pieces (H1d).

Outlet-Level: Editorial Mission (Meso-Level)

Below the country-level, at the meso-level of media organizations, newspapers are not completely similar with respect to how they cover political affairs. For instance, newspapers differ in their market orientation—that is, which groups in the reader market they want to address—and which editorial styles and strategies they use to win these groups over. In short, they differ in their editorial missions. Different editorial missions are particularly evident in the contrast between tabloid newspapers (targeting the mass market) and broadsheets or quality newspapers (targeting better educated, up-market segments of the readership). Tabloids may define what voters should know to evaluate a person’s fitness for public office very differently to how broadsheets might (Esser, 1999). The term ‘tabloid’ refers more to a journalistic style than to a page format. A main criterion for delineating quality-oriented broadsheets from tabloids is an inclination of the latter towards gut issues and topics involving sleaze, scandal, sensation,

human-interest, and entertainment. These topics are supposed to sell better than the substance-heavy topics of the more serious-minded broadsheets.

Mazzoleni (2014) attributes to tabloids an important role in the spread of populism. He perceives two mechanisms at play: First, against the background of their readership, popular media like to present themselves as advocates of the common citizen, which echoes the claim of populist politicians to represent the interests of the common people. Second, in order to achieve the greatest possible attention and impact, tabloids attempt to make politics more palatable and accessible. They do so by stirring up emotions, articulating outrage, serving stereotypes, and exploiting news values. Quality newspapers, on the other hand, are said to largely dispense with populism because their values and interests are more in line with those of the traditional elite (Mazzoleni, 2008; Donohue et al., 1995).

However, research by Akkerman (2011), Bos and Brants (2014), and Rooduijn (2014) found no evidence for the assumption that tabloids publish significantly more populist content. However, it should be noted that Rooduijn (2014) used a more restrictive definition of populism and focused exclusively on opinion articles, while Akkerman (2011) and Bos and Brants' (2014) samples included a small number of mild tabloids. Therefore, the question can hardly be considered settled as yet. Above all, because Wettstein and colleagues (2018) recently discovered, in a ten-country study, that tabloid newspapers have a stronger propensity for people-centrist and anti-elitist bias in news reporting than broadsheets, confirming the assumptions of Mazzoleni (2008, 2014) and Krämer (2014). In view of these discrepancies, we feel compelled to investigate systematically the extent to which different levels of populism in media coverage can be attributed to differences between a mass-market and up-market orientation of newspapers. First, we will investigate the initial assumption:

Mass-market newspapers feature more populist communication in news stories than up-market newspapers (H2a).

We also want to investigate whether the different editorial missions of tabloids and qualities are also reflected in how much populism the two newspaper types publish in their commentaries. In this respect, Mazzoleni (2014) argues that tabloids are consciously amplifying populism to show their allegiance to the sentiment of the masses. Tabloids would thus become accomplices of populist movements, while quality newspapers are the safe-guardians of the political establishment. If this assertion is true, mass-market newspapers should take a much stronger and more frequent populist stance when commenting on political affairs than the elite-oriented up-market newspapers. Our hypothesis states:

We will find more populist communication in commentaries of mass-market newspapers than in those of up-market newspapers (H2b).

Furthermore, the political leaning is another important component of a newspapers' editorial mission. Since right-wing populism emerged as the dominant form of this (thin) ideology in most countries under study (with the potential exceptions of France, Italy, and Greece, where left-leaning populist movements were equally strong) at the time of study, we assume that right-leaning newspapers may be more receptive to populist statements than moderate or left-leaning newspapers. Hence:

We will find more populist communication in news stories and commentaries in right-leaning newspapers than in those of neutral/left-leaning newspapers (H2c).

Outlet-Level: News Logic

While some journalistic cultures and editorial missions may provide more favorable, and others less favorable, opportunity structures for using populist communication in media coverage, these are not the only variables to be considered. Another facilitator of populism-infused newspaper coverage is the extent to which articles follow a certain media logic. Mazzoleni (2008, 2014) argues that there is a congruence between forms of news media logic and populist logic. Since populists often use Manichean narratives, they resort to polarizing and emotional language and dramatization. For instance, blaming elites or out-groups for (alleged or real) wrongdoings meets the criteria of news media logic due to the inherent negativity of the accompanying rhetoric. Unfortunately, there is very little empirical research on this connection, but based on prevailing theoretical assumptions (Mazzoleni, 2008, 2014) we expect that populism will encounter great publication opportunities in those newspaper articles that are written in a particularly dramatic, emotional, polarizing, and negative way, given that these characteristics of news media logic correspond to a widespread populist style (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Block & Negrine, 2017). The vicinity of news media logic and populist style leads us to the next hypothesis:

News stories and commentaries that use the journalistic style elements of polarization, negativity, emotionality, and drama increase the chance that they also contain populist messages (H3).

Furthermore, populist parties have a special relationship with two political issues across Europe, namely EU affairs and immigration. In Southern European countries such as Greece, Spain, and Italy, left-leaning populist movements emerged from the organized resistance and mass protests against EU austerity policies (Kioupkiolis, 2016; Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014). In Germany, the Alternative fuer Deutschland was founded as a populist party opposing the EU bailout and

later started to oppose Chancellor Angela Merkel’s immigration policy. In other countries, opposition to European integration (e.g., in Poland) and opposition to immigration (e.g., in Norway and Serbia) are also part of core populist beliefs. In France and Switzerland, populists campaign on both these issues simultaneously; the Front National and the Swiss People’s Party strive to ‘own’ the issues of immigration and EU affairs and are convinced that citizens’ opinion is on their side in this regard. For these reasons, populists in the respective countries focus their public communication efforts systematically on these topics (Boomgaarden & Vliegthart, 2007). We thus expect:

News articles that feature EU affairs as major topics in addition to immigration contain more populist communication (H4a).

And:

Opinion articles that deal with the issues of immigration and European integration as their main topics contain more populist communication (H4b).

To give the reader a better overview, we have summarized our hypotheses in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1 Overview of hypotheses

<i>Journalistic culture (country-/macro-level)</i>	
— Collaborative and supportive role conception	→ More populist communication in news and commentary (H1a)
— Adversarial role conception	→ More populist communication in commentary (H1b)
— Pedagogical role conception	→ Less populist communication in news and commentary (H1c)
— Market-oriented role conception	→ More populist communication in news and commentary (H1d)
<i>Editorial mission (outlet-/meso-level)</i>	
— Mass-market orientation	→ More populist communication in news (H2a) and commentary (H2b)
— Right-wing political leaning	→ More populist communication in news and commentary (H2c)
<i>News logic (outlet-/meso-level)</i>	
— Style elements of negativity, emotionality, polarization, dramatization	→ More populist communication in news and commentary (H3)
— Issue context of EU integration and immigration	→ More populist communication in news (H4a) and commentary (H4b)

Method

The study design and basic descriptive results are described in the previous chapter by Blassnig et al. The focus here is on the measures and additional contextual factors used in this chapter, and we refer the reader back to the previous chapter for further methodological information.

Dependent Variable

To measure the extent of populist communication in European newspapers, we use an index. However, the index we use in this chapter is slightly different from the index used in the other two content analysis-based chapters in this volume. The reason for this deviation is that more advanced statistical analyses are used in this chapter, which places higher demands on the dependent variable. Our dependent measure considers all 12 key populist messages separately and combines them in a sum index. Our index can therefore vary from 0 to 12. Each type of key message could only be counted once in the same article, except if the speaker or the target of that key message changed in that article. More details on how we coded the key messages are given in the previous chapter.

Since our index does not reflect the absolute number of *individual* populist messages used but how many different *types* of key messages were included in articles, the empirical range is far below the theoretical maximum of 12. Empirically, we found that the European newspapers under study used between zero and five different types of populist key messages per article. Furthermore, our dependent variable allows us to recognize the source of a key message, for instance, whether it was a politician or the journalist writing the article. As mentioned, we distinguish between two types of story samples: immigration news coverage, on the one hand, and opinion pieces, irrespective of the topic, on the other (see the chapter by Blassnig et al. for details).

Independent Variables

Journalistic Culture (Country-/Macro-Level)

Role perceptions are part of the journalistic culture. We are very grateful to Thomas Hanitzsch, who kindly allowed us to work with the variables from the last round of the Worlds of Journalism Study (WJS; see www.worldsofjournalism.org for more details). The countries included in our content analysis are also included in the WJS survey of journalist populations—except for Poland, which we can therefore no longer consider in this chapter. Because the WJS team had recorded journalists' role conceptions prior to our content analysis, these role conceptions can be regarded as potential explanatory

variables for the media content examined (in the sense that a potential cause must precede its effect). It is important to mention that *this analysis will only use the answers of those journalists who work in the field of 'political journalism'; these journalists are most likely to be entrusted with the kind of news stories, political commentaries, and populist topics that we examined in our content analysis. To put it differently: The subgroup of WJS respondents we use here is, structurally, most similar to the writers of the newspaper articles we investigated in our content analysis.*²

The journalists' views of their roles were aggregated at the country-level, since these role perceptions are seen as expressions of national journalism cultures (or, more precisely, as expressions of certain dimensions of national journalism cultures; see Hanitzsch, 2011). Here follows some information on how the WJS team measured these role conceptions in their questionnaire. The collaborative role corresponds with the wish to be a 'supporter of the government'. The adversarial role conception reflects the opposite attitude and unites all those demonstrating a critical distance toward political power holders and authorities by describing themselves as 'adversaries of the government'. The third relevant orientation toward politics is the pedagogical role: These journalists wish to 'promote tolerance' or 'educate citizens'. The fourth role perception expresses a strong market orientation, meaning that journalists see it as their primary task to cater to the tastes of the masses. It is reflected in a desire to 'provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience'.

News Logic and Editorial Mission (Outlet-/Meso-Level)

When composing the media sample, we had already ensured that, wherever possible, we would select newspapers in each country that are both more left-wing and more right-wing, in political terms, as well as newspapers that are both more up-market and more mass-market oriented. The final selection decision was left to the country experts represented in Work Group 2 of our COST Action, who co-authored the three content analysis chapters in this book. We have used the frequent meetings of our working group to discuss the selection decisions and to standardize the evaluation standards created for this purpose (for details and outlets sampled, see the chapter by Blassnig et al.).

Article Style (Story-/Micro-Level)

The article style was determined, independent of populist key messages, on the story level, meaning that the whole article was evaluated before a code for its style was assigned. 'Negativity' was assessed by whether the story had an overall negative tone towards politics, including political actors. 'Dramatization' measured if a situation was described as exceptional by the excessive use of dramatized labels and superlatives.

'Polarization' measured whether the article presented a situation as polarized between two diametrically opposed attitudes toward an issue as if there was only 'black' and 'white'. 'Emotionalization' measured whether the article referred to the speaker's feelings, the feelings of persons or groups featured in the article, or made use of an emotional reporting style. The originally used, more differentiated measuring scales were recoded into dichotomous variables (1 = present, 0 = not present) for this analysis.

Data Structure and Analysis

We use correlation and regression analysis to test our hypotheses. Because our data has a multi-level structure, the regression analysis must account for that. A common rationale for using multi-level models is to ensure that the estimates are trustworthy and not overly optimistic in finding non-null effects (McNeish, Stapleton, & Silverman, 2016). The news stories and commentaries are clustered in media outlets, which are themselves clustered in countries. At the second level, i.e., the level of media outlets, we have 36 newspapers, 12 of which are mass-market newspapers and 24 are up-market newspapers. Moreover, the newspapers are nested in 12 European countries, which, theoretically, form the third and highest level of analysis.

However, since we are actually only dealing with 11 countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Israel, Italy, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland, and the UK), it is impractical to include the country-level as the third level in a multi-level model since the number is low (see Snijders & Bosker, 1999; but also see the chapter by Hameleers, Andreadis, and Reinemann in this volume). Therefore, we will construct multi-level models with newspapers defined as Level 2, and articles as Level 1 units. That means hypotheses relating to the news organization (*H2a–b*) test variables at Level 2, and hypotheses relating to the article (*H3, H4a–b*) are tested at Level 1 in a multi-level model. The hypotheses related to the country (*H1a–d*) are tested separately with a correlation analysis and only for information purposes in an additional multi-level analysis where the countries are defined as Level 2.

Results

Effects of Journalistic Culture on Populism in the Media (Country-Level)

With respect to journalistic role perceptions, the correlation analysis mainly supports the hypotheses. These results, however, must be interpreted with caution, since the number of countries ranges between only 8 and 11. Nonetheless, a few trends can be detected. First, in the news stories sample, a collaborative and supportive journalistic culture correlates with

higher degrees of populism *through* the media, i.e., the average number of populist statements voiced by political actors ($r = .60, p < .05$). In other words, a collaborative and supportive journalistic culture tends to co-occur with a more permissive attitude to populism stemming from political actors. This finding is in line with *H1a*.

Second, *H1b* assumed that an adversarial journalistic culture would go hand in hand with more populism in commentaries. This is confirmed by a positive correlation for the goal ‘monitor and scrutinize political leaders’ ($r = .71, p < .05$) and for the goal ‘be an adversary of the government’ ($r = .40, p = .24$).

Third, a pedagogical role conception is indeed correlated with significantly less populist communication *by* journalists in immigration news stories ($r = -.75, p < .05$ for the item ‘educate the audience’, and $r = -.37, p > .05$ for the item ‘promote tolerance and cultural diversity’). The degree of populism *through* the media is unaffected by a pedagogical role perception though. The predominance of a pedagogical role perception in a country is also correlated with less populism *by* journalists in opinion pieces ($r = -.51, p = .15$ for ‘educate audience’). So, overall, *H1c* is supported as well.

Fourth, there is a positive correlation between the goal to cater to the preferences of the audience and the occurrence of populist messages of any type in immigration news stories in a country ($r = .54$). This is in line with *H1d*, albeit there is no significant relationship.³ These relationships are weaker in the opinion piece sample.

Overall, we can conclude that the predominance of certain role perceptions has a non-negligible influence on the degree of populism in the news coverage at the level of the country.⁴

Effects of News Logic and Editorial Mission (Story Level) on Immigration Coverage

Furthermore, we hypothesized that strong elements of news logic and the issue context of EU integration (*H3* and *H4a*) in an article increased the presence of populist key messages—our dependent variable—in a news story. To test this, we used multi-level regression models; they consider the clustered structure of our data when estimating the effects and separate the variance in populism that lies between the articles (Level 1) and between the newspapers (Level 2). As it is shown by the intra-class correlation coefficient (ICC) of the first, ‘empty’ model (Table 6.2, Model 1), approximately 11 percent of the variance of populism lies between the newspapers.

Next, in Model 2 (Table 6.2), indicators of news logic are entered as fixed effects at Level 1 into the regression. As central elements of news logic, we test the effects of negativity, dramatization, polarization, and emotionalization. We assume them to have positive effects on the degree of populism (*H3*). Indeed, emotionalization, negativity, polarization, and

dramatization all have significant, positive effects on the variety of populist key messages in immigration news stories (Table 6.2). The strongest effects come from negativity and polarization. The issue context also has the expected effect: A dummy indicating that an immigration-related news story is additionally concerned with EU affairs has a positive effect, which is in line with *H4a*.

The significant random effect of the intercept in Model 2 (Table 6.2) calls for testing the effects of explanatory factors located at the level of the newspapers (Level 2). To this end, we ran a means-as-outcomes model (Model 3, Table 6.2) in which we tested the fixed effect of a newspapers' market orientation ('mass-market' coded 1, 'up-market' coded 0) and political leaning ('right' coded 1, 'neutral & left' coded 0).⁵ Remember, we hypothesized that a mass-market orientation and a leaning to the political right would enhance populism in the articles of that newspaper. However, while both variables certainly do explain some variance of the intercept between the newspapers (Pseudo $R^2 = 11.4\%$), their respective effects fail to reach significance, suggesting that neither has a substantial influence on the degree of populism in an article. Therefore, *H2a* and *H2b* receive no support.

Table 6.2 Factors explaining populism in news stories (MLA, Level 2: Newspaper)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Grand mean (intercept)	.543***	-.904***	.497***
<i>Level 1</i>			
Style: Negativity		.335***	–
Style: Drama		.228***	–
Style: Polarization		.331**	–
Style: Emotion		.141*	–
Topic: 'Europe'		.132*	–
<i>Level 2 (Newspaper)</i>			
Tabloid		–	-.112
Right-leaning		–	.124
<i>Random parameters</i>			
Level 1 variance: $\sigma^2_{(within)}$	0.575***	0.485***	.567***
Level 2 variance: $\sigma^2_{(between)}$	0.073**	0.077**	.051***
$R^2(within)$.171***	
$R^2(between)$		–	.114
ICC	0.113	0.116	0.093
N Level 1	762	762	762
N Level 2	36	36	36

Notes: Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients. Dependent variable: Populist communication (scale from 0–12). *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; ([†]) $p < .1$.

Country as Level 2 Unit

To account for the fact that our data is nested in three layers (countries, newspapers, articles) and given that the previous models neglected the highest level of nesting (i.e., the country), we also fitted multi-level regression models where the 11 countries were defined as Level 2 units. Due to the low number of countries, we consider the coefficients as indicative evidence for the effect of country-level factors on populism.

The fixed effects of the news logic indicators in the random intercept model (Model 2, Table 6.3) are similar to the first regression confirming the robustness of the results. Importantly, the model also shows that a substantial amount of variance of populism in news articles lies at the level of the countries ($\sigma^2_{\text{(between)}} = .093$, $p < .1$), which suggests testing the effect of explanatory factors at Level 2 with a means-as-outcomes model. Yet, results for the effect of country-level factors must be interpreted with caution, since we could only include between 9 and 11 countries in the

Table 6.3 Factors explaining populism in news stories (MLA, Level 2: Country)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Grand mean (intercept)	.543***	-.898***	.084
<i>Level 1</i>			
Style: Negativity		.324***	–
Style: Drama		.304***	–
Style: Polarization		.345**	–
Style: Emotion		.158*	–
Topic: ‘EU affairs’		.126*	–
<i>Level 2 (Country)</i>			
Role: Support govt.		–	.129
Role: Educate audience		–	-.276*
Role: Cater to audience		–	.417***
Role: Adversary of govt.		–	-.013
<i>Random parameters</i>			
Level 1 variance: $\sigma^2_{\text{(within)}}$	0.584***	0.490***	.598***
Level 2 variance: $\sigma^2_{\text{(between)}}$	0.083 ^(*)	0.093 ^(*)	.011
$R^2(\text{within})$.176***	–
$R^2(\text{between})$		–	.784***
ICC	0.124	0.135	0.078
N Level 1	762	762	553
N Level 2	12	12	9

Notes: Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients. Dependent variable: Populist communication (scale from 0–12). *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; ^(*) $p < .1$.

analysis, which is too few to calculate robust results. According to *H1a*, a collaborative role perception, at the country-level and, according to *H1d*, a market-oriented role perception, are both expected to increase the degree of populism, while *H1c* assumed that a pedagogical role perception dampens populism in a given countries' news stories.

Model 3 (Table 6.3) shows that a journalistic culture driven by the market-oriented role perception indeed increases the presence of populist key messages used by journalists in a country's immigration news coverage. This is in line with *H1d*. On the other side, a journalistic culture with a strong pedagogical role perception limits inclination to use populist messages in news, as is indicated by the negative effect of the coefficient. Hence, *H1c* is also supported. However, neither the supportive nor the adversarial role perception seems to influence populism in the news.

Altogether, we can draw the conclusion from these analyses that news logic, along with the journalistic culture, matters for the degree of populism in immigration news coverage, while editorial mission in terms of market orientation or political leaning of a newspaper does not.

Effects of News Logic and Editorial Mission (Story-Level) on Opinion Piece Sample

We turn now to the opinion piece sample (632 items from 34 newspapers). We hypothesized analogously to the news articles that the same elements of news logic and the same issue contexts—EU affairs and immigration—would spur populism in commentaries (Level 1). The intra-class correlation coefficient from the empty model shows that a non-negligible 16.6 percent of the variation in the dependent variable lies between the newspapers, suggesting that there are variables at Level 2 at play. In our hypotheses *H2b* and *H2c*, we assumed that the editorial mission in terms of market orientation and the political leaning of the newspaper have effects on the occurrence of populism in commentaries. We thus tested these as potential Level 2 explanatory factors.

The fixed effects of the Level 1 predictors negativity, dramatization, polarization, and emotionalization all have a significant and boosting effect on the degree of populist communication in a commentary. The strongest effects stem from negativity and dramatization. However, whether or not immigration or EU affairs are the main topics of a commentary is irrelevant for that matter. Hence, while *H3* is again supported, *H4b* must be rejected. Furthermore, we find that neither the mass-market vs. up-market difference, nor the political leaning, had any effect on the extent of populism in a commentary (Table 6.4, Model 3).

Furthermore, we again fitted a means-as-outcomes model in which countries were defined as Level 2 for informational purposes (not shown in table). It indicates the effects of the journalistic role perceptions on populism in the commentaries. The strongest effect stems from the

Table 6.4 Factors explaining populism in opinion pieces (MLA, Level 2: Newspaper)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Grand mean (intercept)	0.907***	-1.011***	.870***
<i>Level 1</i>			
Topic: 'Immigration'		-.023	-
Topic: 'EU affairs'		.086	-
Style: Negativity		.501***	-
Style: Drama		.359***	-
Style: Polarization		.274*	-
Style: Emotion		.159*	-
<i>Level 2 (Newspaper)</i>			
Right-leaning		-	.179
Tabloid		-	-.032
<i>Random parameters</i>			
Level 1 variance: $\sigma^2_{(within)}$	0.766***	0.641***	0.766***
Level 2 variance: $\sigma^2_{(between)}$	0.152***	0.095***	0.146***
R^2 (within)		.215***	-
R^2 (between)		-	.051
ICC	0.166	0.104	0.168
N Level 1	632	632	632
N Level 2	34	34	34

Notes: Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients. Dependent variable: Populist communication (scale from 0–12). *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; ([†]) $p < .1$.

educational role and is negative, as expected, thereby further supporting *H1c*. Adversarial and supportive roles both have a weaker, positive effect, which is also in line with the hypotheses. However, none of these effects reaches the conventional levels of significance.

Discussion and Conclusion

Taken together, the results of our analyses suggest the following: First, the fact that there is significant variation in populist communication between the countries underlines the relevance of factors operating at the country-level. Among them are elements of journalistic culture such as role perceptions that clearly matter for the extent of populist communication. In particular, a predominance of pedagogical motivations in the role orientation of journalists acts as a brake for using populist messages in news coverage. Journalists who see themselves primarily as educators for their

audience filter out populist statements from their articles. Normatively, this behavior can be assessed from two directions: On the one hand, it can be welcomed as a contribution by socially responsible media who seek to contribute to the rationalization of social discourse and who do not wish to promote populist simplifications (or political actors who use them). However, it could also be critically questioned as an attempt to influence the public by shielding it from messages judged undesirable by media actors at the expense of narrowing the media discourse. Here we need comparative international follow-up studies in order to learn more about the motives of journalists and then to develop effective strategies for dealing with populists that are tailored to individual countries.

In contrast to pedagogical ambitions stand the influences of market-oriented, supportive, and adversarial role perceptions. With regard to the latter role concepts in particular—supportive and adversarial—it is worth saying a little more. If journalists and political actors interact in an ambience characterized by the journalistic understanding that the media should be facilitators of the government, the media are more permissive with respect to populist political messages. This is probably because journalists see the newspaper's role more in acting as a passive carrier than an active gatekeeper of politicians' pronouncements, even if populist in nature. The predominance of an adversarial journalistic culture, on the other hand, seems to motivate journalists to use more blunt, aggressive language towards elites—including populist statements—in editorials and commentaries.

Our second point of note from this study is that tabloids are not more prone to carry populist messages than broadsheets, despite tabloids' efforts to popularize their content to the largest possible audience. Although found in other studies with different samples (e.g., Wettstein et al., 2018), a tabloids-meet-populism hypothesis is not confirmed by our data. We are not alone in rejecting this widespread assumption. We thus confirm similar findings of various smaller studies, for example, those of Rooduijn (2014) and Akkerman (2011). According to our data, it is not a mass-market orientation at the level of the media organization that spurs journalists' use of populist communication. Rather, journalists' strong preference for features of news logic increases their probability of incorporating populist messages in the same article. In particular, stories emphasizing political conflict and containing emotional cues create favorable conditions for adding populist content. The fact that we could not find any significant differences between tabloids and broadsheets can also be interpreted as an incentive to take a closer look at how journalists deal with populist messages in their daily work. Future studies may need to examine more precisely how journalists use, construct, modify, and incorporate these messages—and how this looks in detail. For instance, it might be that tabloids and broadsheets do not differ in the sheer amount of populist content but rather in the ways in

which they present these populist messages, for example, in headlines or visuals.

As a potential caveat of the analyses, we must consider that the style elements we assume to be independent variables somehow bear a natural resemblance to some of the populist messages, for example, in utterances that contain keen criticism of the elite or that set immigrants and the resident population against each other. So, one could argue as well that populist content is conducive to an emotional, negative, dramatic, or polarized style. Although it is hard to decide which triggers which in journalistic reporting by way of content analysis, we lean to the view that negativity, polarization, etc. are broader frames for political stories that—in the sense of a favorable environment—increase the opportunity for populist messages to slip in as well. Therefore, we believe their conceptualization as an independent variable is justified. Another limitation is that we used a broad concept of anti-elitism, which we think is necessary to capture the cross-national variety of populist utterances.

Furthermore, from a bird's-eye view, the fact that we found strong differences between countries is in line with other cross-cultural studies—such as those explaining the media coverage of the EU financial crisis—which also found a strong influence of national-level factors on reporting (Picard, 2015; Maurer, 2016). Similarly, the country was the strongest predictor in a European study of national members of parliament's EU attitudes, outweighing the influence of their individual political leaning (Gaxie & Hubé, 2012, 2013). Thus, our findings perfectly align with other recent findings demonstrating a powerful role of the national context for how journalists understand and interpret political reality. The present study suggests that this impact also applies to the extent to which journalists include populist messages in immigration-related news stories and commentaries on political affairs.

Summing up, populism is not treated the same way in divergent national journalistic cultures. The differences, with respect to the degrees of populism in the coverage, are echoed by differences between parties to which this label is attached. For example, the differences between the degree of populism in France and in Germany could be explained in terms of the different stages in the development of these countries' populist parties or movements. Whereas the Front National in France is an old phenomenon, the German Alternative fuer Deutschland was in its 'insurgent' (Mazzoleni, 2007, p. 60) stage during the time of data collection. In more general terms, this means that instead of searching for a universal blueprint of the relationship between the media and populism that applies across Europe, we must think in terms of path-dependencies or national political and journalistic fields if we are to understand the relationship between media and populist actors.

The present study permits us to suppose that newspaper coverage of populist messages is more dependent on the political field structure and

the shape of journalistic culture than on universal newspaper types in terms of tabloid or broadsheet. The clear association of media logic contained in a story and populist content which our analysis revealed aside, there is arguably less of a transnational pattern for how media deal with populist communication than a national way that depends in part on the political and journalistic culture. This invites us to be much more cautious when comparing not just populist communication, but media cultures and systems cross-nationally. Clearly there is a lot of heterogeneity in the way specific media outlets, segments and genres operate across Europe, and it is often risky to put individual outlets in one basket (or under one label) and treat them equally, as our analysis has demonstrated once more. Therefore, this chapter finally argues for a more nuanced, culture-sensitive approach to cross-national comparisons of journalistic cultures and their outcomes.

Notes

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2. We had to deviate from this line for France because not enough political journalists could be identified in the WJS dataset; for that reason, we did our calculations with the entire French sample.
3. The tendency reported here is further corroborated by a positive correlation ($r = .39$, $p = .23$) between populism and an index measuring market orientation of journalists (which is called ‘accommodative role’ in the Worlds of Journalism Study).
4. Taking into account that national journalism cultures may be even better reflected by the average role conceptions of all journalists (not only political), we also ran the correlations with values for the whole journalistic workforce. These correlations were all in the same direction as those with political journalists, yet constantly lower. This supports our initial argument that there should be a stronger relationship between features of *political* coverage and the role perceptions of journalists *specializing in political reporting*.
5. In the immigration sample, tabloids harbor on average less than half a populist message per news article (0.42), while quality papers contain slightly more (0.53). The difference is, however, not statistically significant. With regards to opinion pieces, the average number of populist messages is 0.88 of a message for both types of newspapers.

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7 Event-, Politics-, and Audience-Driven News

A Comparison of Populism in European Media Coverage in 2016 and 2017

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Introduction

This chapter focuses on trends in reporting over time. It examines the presence of populist key messages in ‘news coverage of immigration’ and ‘commentaries on current political events’ in European newspapers at two points in time, namely spring 2016 and spring 2017. The chapter has a twofold aim. First, it will explore similarities and differences in the populist content of European newspapers between the two periods. Second, it identifies a set of extra-media and intra-media explanatory factors contributing to the understanding of the emerging differences in a year-to-year comparison.

The chapter by Blassnig et al. in this volume provides more detailed information about the newspaper stories we content-analyzed. Two types of stories are analyzed: ‘news articles on immigration’ and ‘editorials commenting on current political events’, irrespective of the topic. While the chapter by Blassnig et al. pooled and jointly investigated the data from 2016 and 2017, and the chapter by Maurer et al. used only content data from 2017, this chapter will evaluate and compare the data from 2016 and 2017. These two periods are seen as two phases of a news and policy cycle that responds to real-world cues. The two phases are understood as stages of a crisis, which offer more or less favorable opportunity structures for populist discourse (Moffitt, 2015). As stated in the introduction to this volume, a whole range of contextual factors influence the populist worldview of crises and, subsequently, the use of populist communication in news reports and commentaries about these crises.

There were three important contextual factors to consider in our media content analysis, namely real-world events (such as migration movements

and political responses to them), the role of political actors (such as whether populists are involved in government), and public opinion (what issues are perceived as problems by the population). The chapter by Maurer et al. demonstrated that there are important country differences in the use of populist key messages. While Maurer et al.'s cross-sectional data analysis focused on the temporally invariant factors of journalistic culture and news logic as explanatory factors, in this chapter the focus will be on real-world events, political actors, and public opinion, since these factors changed between 2016 and 2017. Links to journalistic culture and news logic will also be examined where necessary. While real-world events and political actors belong to the supply-side conditions of populist communication, public opinion refers to the demand-side conditions.

Theoretical Background

Supply and Demand-Side Conditions: Events, Politics, and Audience-Driven News

As previous studies on the rise of populism have shown, immigration is a key source of concern for the general public (Koopmans & Muis, 2009; Scheepers, Gijsberts, & Coenders, 2002; Vliegenthart, 2018). Our study follows the European refugee crisis, which reached a first high point in the fall of 2015. In many countries, right-wing populist actors in particular used popular fears as an opportunity to raise their profile in electoral contests (Pisoiu & Ahmed, 2016; Wodak, 2015). One example is Bulgaria, where the leader of the conservative party GERB, Boyko Borissov, used immigration for his election campaign in spring 2017 and subsequently formed a government coalition with the right-wing populist party United Patriots. Another example is Matteo Salvini, leader of the Northern League and, from 2018, Deputy Prime Minister in a government coalition with the 5 Star Movement in Italy. His campaign wins in the 2018 Italian election were also due to his use of populist, anti-immigrant rhetoric.

In line with previous research on immigration news and mediated populism, the expectation is that country differences in media coverage are related to supply and demand-side factors (Eberl et al., 2018; Esser, Stępińska, & Hopmann, 2017; Reinemann, Aalberg, Esser, Strömbäck, & de Vreese, 2017; Vliegenthart, 2018; see also the introduction to this volume). So-called event-driven and policy-driven models for explaining news content react to supply-side factors, while audience-driven models for explaining news content refer to the relevance of demand-side factors.

With regard to *event-driven news*, it has long been demonstrated (Peter, 2003) that journalism is contingent upon real-world conditions. Journalists interact with political events and sources when writing news items or commentaries and focus on those that help them construct compelling stories. The event environment is relevant insofar as journalists regularly attribute

news values to various aspects of political reality. The chapter by Maurer et al. demonstrated that journalists prefer those political events which they regard to be newsworthy, and they enrich them with elements of news logic and journalistic culture. Political reality, transformed by journalists for the sake of increasing attention, offers populist actors a favorable entry point into the news cycle to disseminate their ideas to the public.

Politics-driven news suggests that powerful political actors and their policies and strategic maneuvers determine the media agenda (Wolfsfeld, 2011, pp. 1–44). News and commentaries are influenced by so-called primary definers to whom journalists preferentially turn to in their search for orientation, original insights, and authoritative interpretations of social reality. Populist actors in privileged positions (e.g., media darlings, survey winners, strongest party, government participants) also benefit from this. Mazzoleni (2008) claims that the often seamless integration of populist messages in editorial decisions and media content is due to a sort of media complicity, namely, a certain dependence of the media on charismatic figures, provocative rhetoric, and mobilizable issues. In this chapter, however, we also want to focus on audience-driven models for explaining news content.

Audience-driven models assign the audience a significant role in the formation of the news agenda. This model assumes that certain events and policies attract public attention and interest. This, in turn, influences subsequent media coverage because it corresponds with the professional aspirations and economic necessities of journalism to respond to the concerns and anxieties of its audience. While there are some topics that can be better explained with media-centered perspectives of agenda-building, there are other topics for which audience-driven models should be considered (Uscinski, 2009). An audience-driven model would expect that it is the public perception of problems, rather than the underlying events directly, that have an influence on journalistic decisions when writing news articles and commentaries on these problems—including the question of how much populism goes into the story.

We will examine our data to discover which of these three explanatory models for changes in populism reporting offer the most evidence. We cannot statistically test the validity of these three explanations in a strict sense, but we can draw plausibility conclusions. Therefore, we refrain from hypothesis testing and limit ourselves to research questions:

How does the extent of populism in the news and commentaries of European newspapers in 2016 and 2017 relate to supply-side conditions (expressed in immigration trends and the role of populist parties) (RQ1)?

How does the degree of populism in immigration news and political commentaries relate to demand-side conditions, more precisely to citizens' perceptions of the issue of immigration and citizens'

assessment of the overall course of the country in 2016 and 2017 (expressed in survey responses) (RQ2)?

In addition, another theoretical possibility should be considered. Recall that the chapter by Maurer et al. found, in their cross-sectional analysis, that it is not so much *extra-media* contextual conditions, but rather *intra-media* conditions of journalistic working modes (professional culture, news logic) that best explain populism in news and commentaries. Our longitudinal analysis may also find evidence for this; therefore we must ask:

How does the degree of populism in immigration news and political commentaries in 2016 and 2017 relate to intra-media aspects of journalistic work (expressed in reporting practices) (RQ3)?

While politics-driven news mainly focuses on the importance of populist parties in national government policy (we will discuss this later), events-driven news focuses on immigration figures and audience-driven news on public opinion moods. We start with background information on the latter two aspects.

Events and Their Perception

To understand the perception of events, we must first turn to events themselves. To provide an idea of the migration dynamics in Europe during our study period, Table 7.1 presents the official numbers of refugees recorded by the EU for the ten countries that will be examined in more detail below.

Table 7.1 Eurostat data on asylum and first time asylum applicants (raw numbers)

<i>Country</i>	<i>2015</i>	<i>2016</i>	<i>2017</i>
Bulgaria	20,365	19,420	3,695
Czech Republic	1,515	1,475	1,445
Germany	476,510	745,155	222,560
Greece	13,205	51,110	58,650
Israel	–	–	–
Italy	83,540	122,960	128,850
Norway	31,110	3,485	3,520
Poland	12,190	12,305	5,045
Serbia	–	–	–
Switzerland	39,445	27,140	18,015

Source: http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr_asyappctza&clang=en.

Notes: No EU data available for Israel and Serbia.

According to Eurostat data (of which Table 7.1 presents an extract), more than one million people migrated to the European Union, via the Mediterranean, in 2015. A total of 848,000 took the Balkan route and first arrived in Greece; 153,000 took the central Mediterranean route and landed in Italy. In 2015, 1,294,000 people applied for asylum in Europe, and 1,260,000 in 2016. By far the most applications for asylum were filed in Germany. Observers attested that the EU had temporarily lost control in the context of rising figures and the lack of regulation. There was no orderly registration and distribution of refugees. Critics attributed a significant share of the increase in the number of asylum seekers to German Chancellor Angela Merkel, whose public statements in 2015 could be regarded as suspending the Dublin Regulation (setting rules for registering and distributing asylum seekers in the EU) and ‘inviting’ refugees to Europe. An initially widespread refugee welcome mood gave way to a more critical mood among the population.

In the wake of the refugee crisis, the issue of immigration made a huge leap on the list of concerns held by EU citizens. While in autumn 2014 only 25 percent of EU citizens saw immigration as an important problem for the EU, in autumn 2015, at the peak of the refugee crisis, it was 58 percent. The Eurobarometer asks citizens regularly, ‘What do you think are the two most important issues facing the European Union at the moment’ and ‘facing your country at the moment’. In spring 2016—at the time of the first wave of our media content analysis—the proportions of citizens by country who regarded immigration as a central problem *for the EU* were Bulgaria: 57 percent, Czech Republic: 67 percent, Germany: 57 percent, Greece: 40 percent, Italy: 44 percent, and Poland: 51 percent (no data available for Israel, Norway, Serbia, and Switzerland in Eurobarometer no. 85). EU citizens also answered the same question in relation to *their own country*, and the approval rates for immigration as a *major national problem* are shown in Table 7.2.

From the point of view of populism research, the question naturally arises as to whether citizens in those countries in which immigration is perceived as a pressing national problem will doubt the ability of the political elite to solve those problems (indicating anti-elitism). The Eurobarometer regularly asks whether EU citizens have the impression ‘that, in general, things are going in the right direction or in the wrong direction’ in their home country. A high level of approval for ‘in the wrong direction’ expresses public dissatisfaction with the political situation and—importantly—those responsible for it. Table 7.3 shows the findings for those countries included in the content analysis. Public dissatisfaction with national institutions and political leaders has a connection with societal pessimism and anti-elitist populism (Steenvoorden & Harteveld, 2018). In other words, in a country where the public is dissatisfied with the course of national institutions and political decision-makers to date, the chances of populist communication in politics and the media are likely to increase.

Table 7.2 Eurobarometer question whether citizens perceive immigration as one of the two most important issues ‘facing their country’ at the moment (agreement in percent)

<i>Country</i>	<i>Spring 2015</i>	<i>Autumn 2015</i>	<i>Spring 2016</i>	<i>Autumn 2016</i>	<i>Spring 2017</i>
Bulgaria	8	21	13	29	15
Czech Republic	18	47	32	25	23
Germany	46	76	56	45	37
Greece	11	20	20	15	12
Israel	–	–	–	–	–
Italy	31	30	28	42	36
Norway	–	–	–	–	–
Poland	9	17	16	11	16
Serbia	3	14	6	7	8
Switzerland	36 ^a	–	26 ^a	–	11 ^a

Source: Standard Eurobarometer no. 84 (2015), 85 (2016), 86 (2016), 87 (2017).

Notes: No Eurobarometer data available for Israel, Norway, or Switzerland.

a For Switzerland, data from the Credit Suisse Barometer of Concerns was added.

Table 7.3 Eurobarometer question whether citizens believe that things are going in the right or in the wrong direction in their country; agreement with ‘in the wrong direction’ in percent

<i>Country</i>	<i>Spring 2015</i>	<i>Autumn 2015</i>	<i>Spring 2016</i>	<i>Autumn 2016</i>	<i>Spring 2017</i>
Bulgaria	49	49	53	66	58
Czech Republic	30	39	40	49	47
Germany	30	48	46	40	39
Greece	49	77	86	92	89
Israel	–	–	–	–	–
Italy	52	51	53	70	65
Norway	–	–	–	–	–
Poland	37	27	50	55	46
Serbia	34	36	41	45	46
Switzerland	–	–	–	–	–

Source: Standard Eurobarometer no. 84 (2015), 85 (2016), 86 (2016), 87 (2017).

Notes: No Eurobarometer data available for Israel, Norway, or Switzerland.

We will return to the findings from Table 7.1 when we search for an explanatory basis for event-driven news, and we will return to Tables 7.2 and 7.3 when we search for an explanatory basis for audience-driven news. All three tables should help us to answer *RQs 1* and *2* by linking them to our media content analysis data.

Method

With regard to the central parameters of the design of our media content analysis, please refer to the chapter by Blassnig et al. In that chapter you will find more information on the composition of the sample of newspapers and stories, our operationalization of populism and populist key messages, and the reliability of our content-analytical measurements across coders and countries. In the present chapter, we focus on a comparison over time, but in contrast to the previous two content analysis chapters, we must exclude France and the United Kingdom because their newspapers were not examined in 2016, only in 2017.

To calculate the extent of populist communication in European press coverage over time, we use the same overall populism sum index as described in Blassnig et al.'s chapter in this volume. It can assume values from 0 to 4. A value of 0 means that no populist key message was contained in any of the analyzed stories. A value of 4 would mean that each story analyzed contained key messages from all four dimensions of populism (anti-elitism, people-centrism, restoring national sovereignty, and exclusion of others). Accordingly, a value of 0.5 means that every second story contained key messages of at least one dimension.

Results

Event and Politics-Driven Populism in the Media, 2016–2017

Table 7.4 provides an overview of how often newspapers in the ten European countries analyzed have supplemented their news reports on immigration with populist key messages in 2016 and 2017. However, the findings of Table 7.4 are not interpreted in isolation, but in combination with the findings from Tables 7.5 and 7.6, which help us to maintain an overall picture and avoid the danger of obscuring the true picture.

Table 7.5 shows how often European newspapers have also used populist key messages in their commentaries on political events. In order to be able to interpret Table 7.4 meaningfully, it is of further interest to discover what the most frequently discussed topics were in the newspaper commentaries. This is shown in Table 7.6, which lists the three most commented on topics in 2016 and 2017 (we have recorded an additional 20 topics, but they were much rarer); in addition, the table shows how strongly the newspaper commentaries presented these three topics in a populist way. Table 7.6 reveals that immigration was the most commented on topic in 2016; in the following year, 2017, most comments were about Europe and the question of whether it can meet its challenges.

With regard to the first research question, there are links between the frequency with which the topic of immigration is discussed in news items and commentaries using populist key messages—and the presence of refugees and populist actors in the respective countries. For example,

Table 7.4 Frequency of populist key messages in news stories about immigration in 2016 and 2017, expressed as mean values of the populism index

<i>Country</i>	<i>2016</i>		<i>2017</i>		<i>Difference in means between both periods</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Bulgaria	0.53	0.57	0.77	0.60	+0.24
Czech Republic	0.44	0.58	0.32	0.55	-0.12
Germany	0.79	0.78	0.76	0.83	-0.03
Greece	0.75	0.64	0.57	0.69	-0.18
Israel	1.0	0.98	0.71	0.86	-0.29
Italy	0.23	0.46	0.30	0.58	+0.07
Norway	0.20	0.43	0.19	0.39	-0.01
Poland	0.60	0.55	1.0	0.63	+0.40
Serbia	0.32	0.54	0.11	0.32	-0.21
Switzerland	0.47	0.57	0.47	0.59	0.0
Total	0.53	0.61	0.52	0.60	-0.01

Notes: *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation. Number of key messages analyzed: *N*(2016) = 761, *N*(2017) = 762. Periods of media content analyses were spring 2016 (February to April) and spring 2017 (February to April).

Table 7.5 Frequency of populist key messages in commentaries in 2016 and 2017, expressed as mean values of the populism index

<i>Country</i>	<i>2016</i>		<i>2017</i>		<i>Difference in means between both periods</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Bulgaria	0.64	0.71	0.68	0.87	+0.04
Czech Republic	0.52	0.62	0.23	0.48	-0.29
Germany	0.80	0.68	0.86	0.67	+0.08
Greece	0.95	0.53	0.98	0.61	+0.03
Israel	1.17	0.75	1.15	0.81	-0.02
Italy	0.36	0.51	0.40	0.54	+0.04
Norway	0.22	0.48	0.19	0.39	-0.03
Poland	0.96	0.47	1.17	0.52	+0.21
Serbia	0.76	0.69	0.59	0.62	-0.20
Switzerland	0.83	0.76	0.59	0.67	-0.21
Total	0.72	0.62	0.68	0.62	-0.04

Notes: *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation. Number of key messages in commentaries analyzed: *N*(2016) = 588, *N*(2017) = 632. Periods of media content analyses were spring 2016 (February to April) and spring 2017 (February to April).

Table 7.6 The three most frequently addressed topics in the commentaries of European newspapers, and the combination of these topics with populist key messages

Topic	Frequency N (%)			Overall populism index (mean)		
	2016	2017	Year-to-year difference	2016	2017	Difference in means
Immigration	149 (15%)	86 (9%)	-6%	0.80	0.63	-0.23
Societal values and norms	124 (13%)	124 (13%)	0%	0.83	0.75	-0.08
Europe	111 (12%)	131 (13%)	+1%	0.80	0.78	-0.02

Notes: Up to three topics per commentary could be coded; frequencies were summed up. Missing data to 100 percent concern commentaries on other topics which we have not listed here for reasons of clarity.

the high populist values of German and Greek newspapers in their news (Table 7.4) and commentaries on immigration and Europe (Table 7.6) can be interpreted as a reaction to the many arriving refugees and the associated political challenges in the context of an unenforced Dublin Regulation. On the other hand, in countries where the number of refugees had been restricted rapidly (e.g., Norway; see Table 7.1), the proportion of populism in immigration news and commentaries was low (see Tables 7.4 and 7.5). In Serbia, where few immigrants stopped during the refugee crisis, immigration never became a big topic for the media.

The finding that reporting on immigration is higher in the regions more affected by it has been well corroborated in research literature. For example, Dunaway, Branton, and Abrajano (2010) found, for the United States, that media attention to immigration is greater in border states than in non-border states. In view of the high populist values for German and Greek newspapers in 2016, however, it is rather the populism-using reporting of the immigration issue that can be explained in this way. A similarly high trend of populism-infused coverage could also have been expected for Italy. However, although public concern about rising immigration flows and media coverage of the immigration issue was high in 2016–2017, Italian newspapers were reluctant to use populist key messages (Tables 7.4 and 7.5). At the same time, however, these newspapers focused strongly on tightening immigration controls on boat traffic with Libya and tightening the naturalization law for babies born to foreigners in Italy, as was revealed upon closer scrutiny of Italian news stories and commentaries.

In the newspapers of the three countries most affected by arriving refugees (Germany, Greece, and Italy), it is striking that the populist

coloration of their reporting was not determined by xenophobic, exclusionary messages, but by anti-elitist statements (on the prominence of anti-elitist media coverage, see also Blassnig et al.'s chapter in this volume). This is particularly noticeable in the case of Greece. In 2016, the Greek newspapers voiced their criticism of an ineffective 'EU relocation and resettlement scheme', which would not bring relief due to the refusal of many EU states to accept Greek and Italian immigrants. They also criticized the 'EU Turkey refugee deal', which would not bring relief due to various problems between Greece and Turkey at the time. The anti-elitist criticism by Greek newspapers was also directed against Brussels because its 'Dublin III regulation' would contribute to even more catastrophic conditions in Greece's already overburdened first-time reception centers, by returning refugees back to them from countries such as Germany. Between 2016 and 2017, the use of exclusionary populist statements in immigration news and commentaries decreased in all countries studied—including those countries most affected by new arrivals—whereas anti-elitist statements predominated.¹

Other countries revealed a different pattern. This brings us to European countries where immigration figures were low and were reduced even further from 2016 to 2017, but the degree of mediated populism was high, and increased even further from 2016 to 2017. This applies, for example, to Bulgaria and Poland (see Tables 7.1, 7.4, and 7.5). Here the reporting obviously does not react to the actual immigration, but rather to what populist actors have done with the topic (politics-driven news instead of event-driven news). As previously mentioned, Bulgarian populists took advantage of the issue in their 2017 general election campaign. In countries with strong populist actors, some of whom had governmental responsibility (this includes Poland, Israel, and Switzerland), news and commentary reacted more strongly to the handling of events by politicians than to the genuine events themselves.

In summary, to answer *RQ1* there was some tentative evidence of a connection between (1) the extent of populism in the news and commentaries of European newspapers in 2016 and 2017 and (2) supply-side conditions, in this case immigration events and political actions.

Audience-Driven Populism in the Media, 2016–2017

The topic of immigration is such that an audience-driven effect on news content can be expected. Certain problems stimulate public interest and awareness to such an extent that for professional and economic reasons, journalists feel compelled to respond in news and commentary (Uscinski, 2009). The second research question asks how citizens' perceptions of immigration as an important issue and their assessment of the overall course of the country relate to the subsequent populism-infused reporting of immigration.

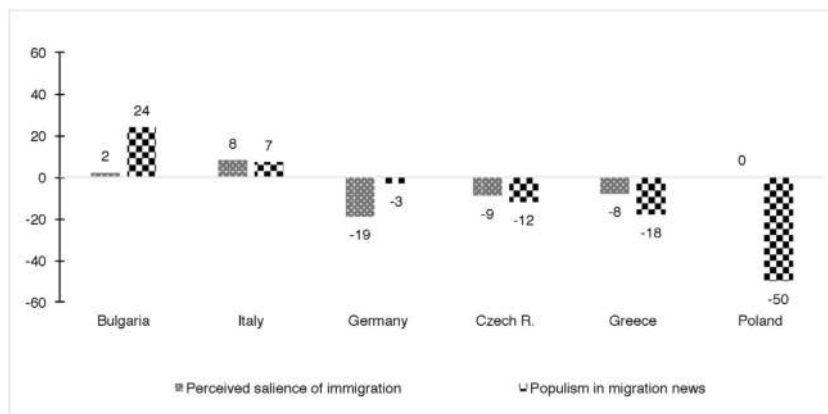


Figure 7.1 Co-development of populism in migration news and perceived salience of immigration among citizens/the audience (difference between 2016 and 2017 in %)

The data in Figure 7.1 give us initial indications that there may be parallels between longer-term trends in the public perception of the immigration problem and longer-term trends in news reporting on immigration. It would be wrong to overstretch the data, but what Figure 7.1 reveals can be seen below (countries with different or missing data sources cannot be considered).

In countries where there has been an increase in the public perception of immigration as an urgent problem, there has been an increase in populism-using reporting on the issue over the same period. According to Eurobarometer data in Table 7.2, the increase in the perceived importance of the topic between spring 2016 and spring 2017 was +2 for Bulgaria and +8 for Italy, and the increase in reporting over the same period was +24 for Bulgaria and +8 for Italy (according to Table 7.4). Correspondingly, we find that in countries where concerns about immigration among the population decreased between spring 2016 and spring 2017 (Czech Republic -9, Germany -19, Greece -8), populist coverage of immigration also decreased (Czech Republic -12, Germany -3, Greece -18).

Audience Perceptions, Events, and Media Examined Together, 2016–2017

The findings presented in Figure 7.1 can only be considered a weak indication of the audience-driven model for explaining news content. An alternative is to compare relevant data from 2016 and 2017 and check their correlative relationships more comprehensively by integrating other

relevant variables into a systematic overall model. We constructed such a model with the data provided in the previous tables, and we offer a graphical presentation of it in Figure 7.2. The model includes data from Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Italy, Norway, Poland, Serbia, and Switzerland. Where data from Eurostat or Eurobarometer was not available, the cases were excluded on a case-by-case basis. The correlations between the cases were calculated using Pearson coefficients. Where for logical reasons there can only be one-sided influence relationships, we worked with one-sided significance tests (represented by \rightarrow arrows); where there can be two-sided influence relationships, we used two-sided significance tests (represented by \leftrightarrow arrows).

Figure 7.2 has three levels: events, perceptions, and media. On the level of perceptions—at the center of the chart—two variables of the audience-driven model are located: ‘share of citizens perceiving immigration as a major national issue’² and ‘share of citizens expressing dissatisfaction with the direction of the country and political decision makers’.³ According to the assumptions of the audience-driven model, the perceived salience of the immigration issue and the widespread anxiety and political dissatisfaction (of the public) is seen as a cause for populism-infused immigration reporting or populism-infused commentary on the current political situation (by journalists). While the first variable suggests that journalists react to the topic of immigration (and its implications) with people-centrist and perhaps even exclusionary key messages, the second variable suggests that anti-elitist and perhaps even national-sovereigntist messages will also be included in the coverage.

At the highest level, Figure 7.2 also takes into account real-world events which are likely to influence the perceptions of the population on one hand, and media coverage on the other. As reality cues, we have included the ‘number of arriving asylum applications in country’⁴ as a potential influencing factor. Finally, at the lowest level of Figure 7.2, we find media coverage broken down by the two indicators, ‘populist key messages in commentaries on current political issues’⁵ and ‘populist key messages in news coverage on immigration’.⁶

How do we interpret the findings of Figure 7.2? Our interest in the audience-driven model first draws our attention to paths (2), (3), and (4). They tell us that journalists using populist key messages in 2016 were equally responsive to the population’s concerns about the immigration issue (2) and to citizens’ dissatisfaction with directional decisions taken by political elites (3, 4). These audience-driven influences are only marginally weaker than real-world influences, i.e., the actual number of arriving refugees (path 1), on the use of populist messages in the immigration news. However, all mentioned influences of the paths (1) to (4) are only between $r = .41$ and $r = .51$; they are comparatively low and insignificant in a statistical sense. The soft evidence for audience-driven news presented in Figure 7.1 cannot be corroborated substantially in the more complex

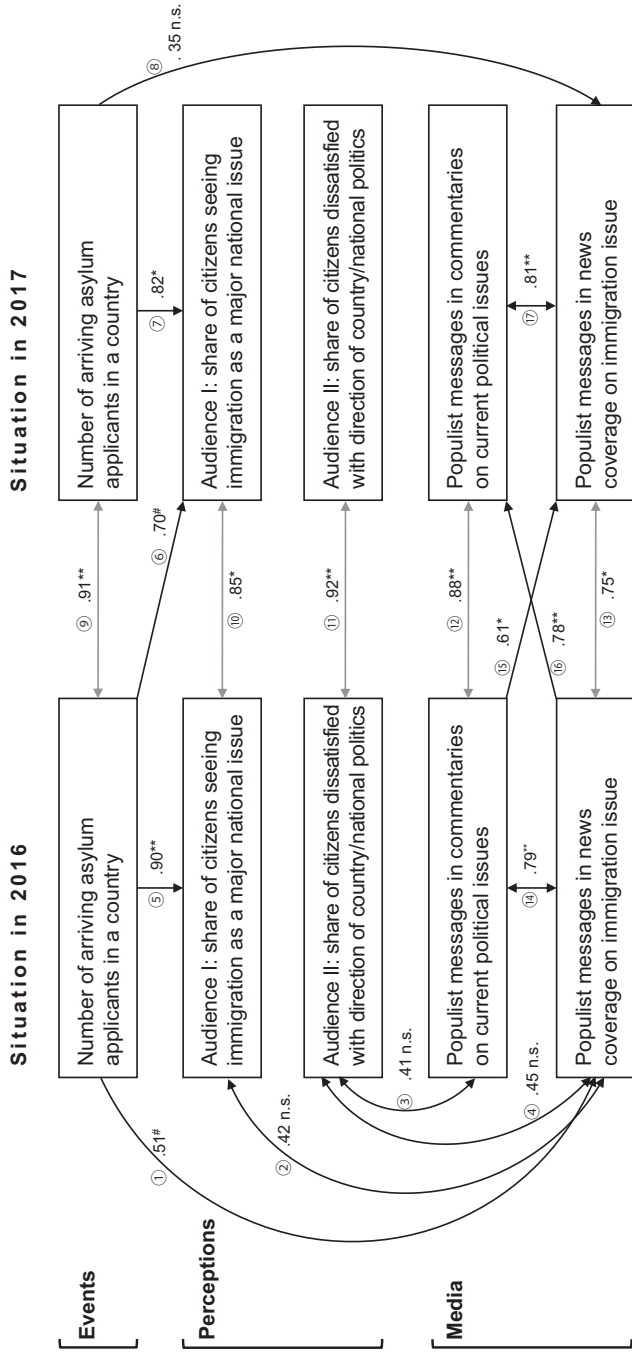


Figure 7.2 Path model comparing relationships between real-world events, audience perceptions, and media coverage in 2016 and 2017

Notes: $N = 9$ countries. Only Pearson coefficients $r \geq .35$ are shown; # $p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

model of Figure 7.2. In other words, neither for 2016, nor 2017, do the correlations in Figure 7.2 give us statistically significant indications that journalists' use of populist messages in news or commentaries is related to audience-driven processes.

Events, on the other hand, have a greater influence than the audience. The number of arriving asylum applicants in a country in 2016 and 2017 largely determined the share of citizens perceiving immigration to be a major national issue in 2016 (path 5) and 2017 (paths 6 and 7). However, the influence of immigration figures on the extent of populism in the immigration news coverage remained very weak both in 2016 and 2017 (paths 1 and 8). While Tables 7.4 and 7.5 had found soft evidence for the validity of the event-driven news model in some selected countries (e.g., Germany and Greece), this influence disappears when all countries are considered together (as in Figure 7.2).

According to Figure 7.2, the best explanation for events, audience perceptions, and media coverage in the year 2017 was the previous conditions of 2016. The highly significant autocorrelations of paths (9), (10), (11), (12), and (13) indicate that conditions in the various countries did not develop arbitrarily, but followed path-dependent patterns. Political decisions on how many asylum seekers are allowed into the country have evolved as consistently as public opinion and the practices of national news organizations.

A Deeper Look at the Role of the Media

This seemingly great consistency in news organization practices deserves a closer look—and it brings us to our third research question. The fact that we find hardly any noteworthy evidence in Figure 7.2 for the assumptions of the event-driven and audience-driven model to explain *populism in media coverage* draws our attention to the explanatory factor introduced by *RQ3*, namely, intra-media aspects of journalistic work.

Indeed, the extent of populist key messages in political commentaries and immigration news in 2017 is not primarily determined by public opinion or the events of the same year, but by processes of journalistic self-referentiality (see the multiple mutual influences at the level of the 'media' in Figure 7.2). Various scholars such as Staney (2014) have pointed to the fact that newspapers monitor each other's coverage closely and respond accordingly; they align their reporting and commenting with the practices of journalists from other media, or with previous publications of their own staff. Inter-media agenda-setting and journalists' herd behavior can influence news decisions and editorial positions; processes of professional socialization and social control within news organizations can further promote convergence of attitudes and practices. In terms of our topic, mediated populism may be less determined by extra-media factors and more by intra-media factors.

To explain paths (14), (15), and (17), Schoenbach's (2008) concept of synchronizing news and opinion is helpful. In his understanding, 'synchronization' means the selection and presentation of news to favor a medium's marked editorial policy or stance. Synchronized news, then, is news selected and presented to support a medium's anti or pro-immigration sentiments, for instance, or its liberal or conservative philosophy (Schoenbach, 2008). This argument is congruent with Kepplinger, Brosius, and Staab (1991) 'theory of instrumental actualization'. It describes the tendency of journalists to align their news decisions with their previous editorial positions in an attitude-fitting fashion. Path (16) further indicates that journalists rely heavily on examples and events they have covered in the news (and their framing) to comment on what is going on in the world. This is line with Scheufele's (2006) work on journalistic framing, which argues that journalists set frames with their earlier reporting that influence their later editorial decisions.

Recall that *RQ1* and 2 asked if growing populism in immigration news could be a response to immigration-related real-world trends or to growing public concerns about immigration and directional decisions taken by political elites. The answer is that there is hardly any convincing empirical evidence for it. This does not mean that the events and concerns of the population do not play a role, but rather that they are not the main explanatory factors for how much *populism* there is in media reports. However, the comparison of two time periods further supports conclusions we already made in Maurer et al.'s chapter on the basis of cross-sectional data analysis—namely, that *intra-media factors* such as journalistic culture and news logic play a powerful role in explaining populism in the news. We can thus answer *RQ3* in the affirmative.

Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter is based on the same content analysis data presented in detail in Blassnig et al.'s chapter of this volume. Unlike the previous two chapters, the focus here is on a comparison of 2016 and 2017 in order to understand *trends* in the use of populist key messages in news articles and commentaries. Theoretically speaking, the two periods under study can be seen as two phases of a crisis in which different conditions prevailed with regard to migration movements, political reactions, and problem perceptions of the public.

The findings show that the presence of populism in news and commentaries in some countries is loosely related to actual migration dynamics (in the sense of event-driven news; see Germany and Greece), whereas *in other countries* it seems to follow more intensive political debates, although actual immigration is less dramatic (in the sense of politics-driven news; see Bulgaria and Poland). There are fewer indications than expected that the populist tendencies in news and commentaries are a reaction to the

intensity with which the population views immigration as an important national issue or is dissatisfied with trend-setting decisions by political elites (in the sense of audience-driven news; the weak evidence in Figures 7.1 and 7.2). Finally, there are strong indications that the great importance of intra-media factors in explaining populism in news and commentary—already highlighted in Maurer et al.'s chapter—are also clearly present in our temporal comparison. This is the essential finding of Figure 7.2.

For an overall assessment of the situation, it is also necessary to emphasize that, on average, there was a decline in populist news and comments in all the countries we examined between 2016 and 2017. We attribute this primarily to three developments: first, the EU-Turkey deal in March 2016 and the resulting decline in immigration figures; second, political searches for solutions at EU and national level (e.g., with regard to dealing with the Dublin Regulation); and third, a more reflective approach by journalists to aspects of migration, migration policy, and populism. The last point is supported, for example, by the finding that the proportion of exclusionist populism in the immigration news of all the countries studied decreased between 2016 and 2017.⁷ However, the decline in populism was also attributable to a fourth factor, namely the fact that newspapers, which in 2016 had focused considerably on the international and Europe-wide dimensions of the crisis, returned to focusing more on national conditions in 2017.

This study also has some limitations, many of which were already discussed in the chapter by Blassnig et al. However, there are some additional restraints specifically with regard to the comparison over time. First, we are comparing only two time periods that are one year apart. While these two waves capture important phases during the European refugee crisis, a longer investigation period would have allowed more long-term analyses and broader conclusions. Secondly, because internationally standardized data was not available for all countries, our investigation of the co-development between the perceived salience of immigration in the public and populism in migration news had to remain largely descriptive. Thirdly, and in connection with the second point, the path model presented in Figure 7.2 is based on a small sample and its results should therefore be generalized only with caution.

In conclusion, the findings in this chapter support the theoretical position that contextual and situational factors influence, in *some* countries and to *some* extent, the use of populist communication in media coverage. However, it is mainly intra-media factors that explain the *general* development of reporting between 2016 and 2017.

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Notes

1. These analyses, differentiated according to dimensions, are not shown in the tables.
2. For this, the Eurobarometer data for spring 2016 and spring 2017 from Table 7.2 have been included in the calculations.
3. For this, the Eurobarometer data for spring 2016 and spring 2017 from Table 7.3 have been included. These periods correspond to the periods of our media content analysis.
4. For this, the Eurostat data for 2016 and 2017 from Table 7.1 have been included in the calculations.
5. For this, we used the data for 2016 and 2017 from Table 7.4.
6. For this, we used the data for 2016 and 2017 from Table 7.5.
7. See endnote 1. This is an additional finding that is not shown in the tables above.

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Part III

Populism and Citizens



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8 The Persuasiveness of Populist Communication

Conceptualizing the Effects and Political Consequences of Populist Communication From a Social Identity Perspective

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Introduction

In the midst of the alleged global rise of populist ideas in politics, media, and society, a growing body of literature has argued that populist communication has important effects on citizens' opinions, emotions, and behaviors (e.g., Bos, Van Der Brug, & De Vreese, 2013; Hameleers, Bos, & de Vreese, 2017a; Müller et al., 2017; Schmuck & Matthes, 2017; Wirz, 2018). Some scholars even argue that the media's attention to populist politicians, and the actual use of populist ideas by the media, can be regarded as one of the central *causes* of populism's electoral success (e.g., Krämer, 2014; Mazzoleni, Stewart, & Horsfield, 2003). For this reason, it is no wonder that the field of populist communication research has gained in prominence and scope (e.g., Aalberg, Esser, Reinemann, Strömbäck, & de Vreese, 2017). Despite the growing interest by stakeholders and scholars, the psychological underpinnings of populist communication's effects remain under-theorized and under-studied, which has important ramifications for future empirical work that aims to dissect the persuasive elements of populist communication. Against this backdrop, this chapter aims to provide a comprehensive overview of (1) important individual and context-level factors that determine the audience's resistance or persuasion to populist communication; (2) the mechanisms by which populist communication affects receivers; (3) citizens' cognitive, attitudinal, emotional, and behavioral responses to populist political communication; and (4) long-term political consequences of exposure to populist communication. An overview of the relevant elements that we will discuss in detail below can be found in Figure 8.1.

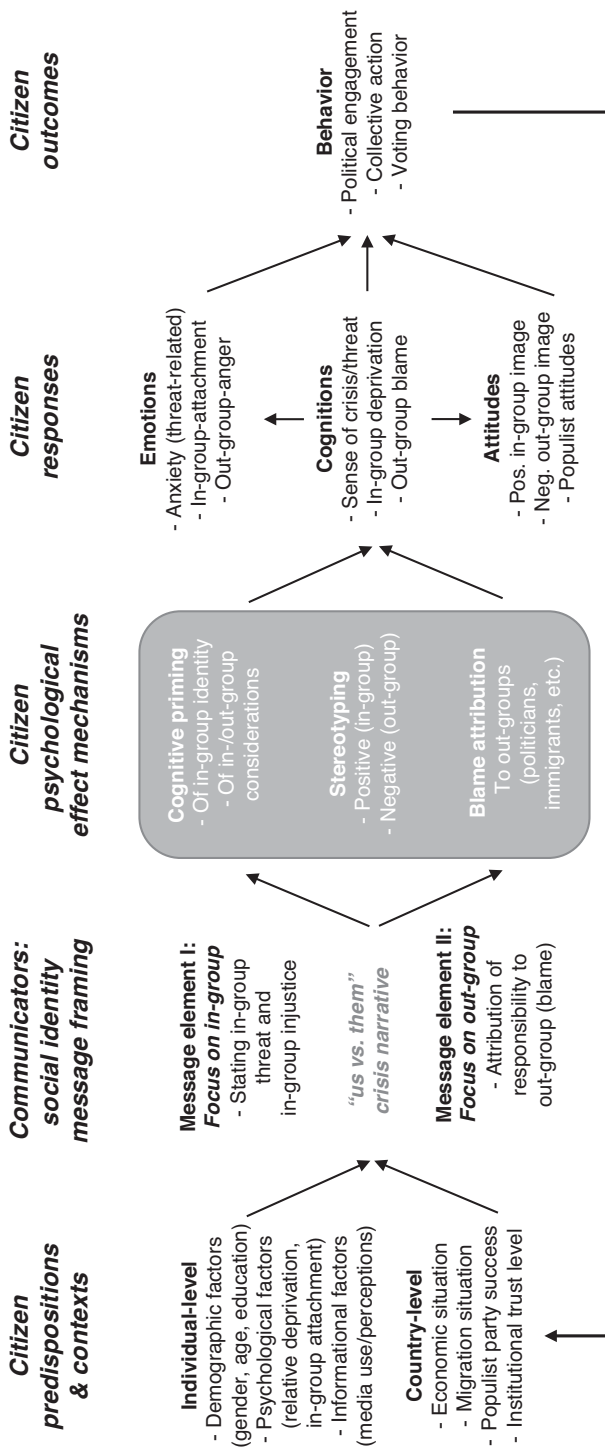


Figure 8.1 A model of individual effect processes in populist political communication

Citizens' Predispositions and Contexts

In order to understand the effects of populist communication, it is crucial to assess the congruence of populist messages, the source, and the sensitivity of populist messages to contextual demand-side factors of the electorate. Recent empirical research has explored the effects of populist communication among a varied sample of citizens. Matthes and Schmuck (2017), for example, found that populist communication is most persuasive for citizens with lower levels of education. Bos et al. (2013) found that populist messages are particularly effective for the politically cynical. The empirical results of Hamelaers and Schmuck (2017) further indicated that support of the source plays a pivotal role in the acceptance of populist messages: only citizens who feel close to or support the source are positively affected by populist communication. Taken together, these studies clearly demonstrate that populist communication is most persuasive for a specific group of citizens for whom the message is congruent with their prior convictions, whereas it may even backfire among other citizens with incongruent views and may prime their already negative evaluations of populist viewpoints. Polarization may thus be fueled as a consequence of exposure to populist messages. Only when these prior attitudes or perceptual screens are taken into account, can we start to predict the effects of populist communication.

Moreover, in the multifaceted nature of populist communication throughout the globe, there may be a plethora of contextual factors that differ between countries and that might affect individual susceptibility to persuasion by populist messages. It is therefore crucial to assess the extent to which populist communication resonates with both individual-level factors and demand- and supply-side opportunity structures which are salient among the electorate and within their environment (see also Aalberg et al., 2017). Therefore, in this section, we focus on three core levels of resonance: (1) demographic factors; (2) psychological factors; and (3) country-level opportunity structures.

Individual Level: Demographic Factors

Many scholars have argued that populist discourse appeals to a group of citizens with a specific demographic profile (Kriesi et al., 2006; Mazzoleni, 2008). Specifically, populist voters have largely been described as a group of *lower educated citizens* (e.g., van Hauwaert & van Kessel, 2018). In addition, people who support populist ideas have been regarded as *younger* (e.g., Arzheimer & Carter, 2006; Minkenberg & Pytlas, 2012) and predominately *male* voters (Immerzeel, Coffé, & van der Lippe, 2015; Ivarsflaten & Harteveldt, 2018). Combining various demographic characteristics, Kriesi et al. (2006) have conceptualized the populist electorate as the so-called 'losers of modernization'. These 'losers' are typically defined

as a vulnerable group of citizens who are poorly educated, are of a lower social class, and have a lower income.

Due to external modernization and globalization processes, these citizens are argued to have lost out when compared to other groups, as they are no longer able to keep up (e.g., Kübler & Kriesi, 2017; Rodrik, 2018). Hence, they are perceived as victims of processes that are forced upon them from above. This is where the appeal of populism comes in. Populism introduces causes of modernization that threaten the ordinary people: the failing elites have caused the people's deprivation and should therefore be punished. Populism is thus expected to be persuasive for those disadvantaged by modernization because it voices these 'vulnerable' people's concerns that they are being deprived by external forces propagated by the corrupt elites. This, for example, applies to countries in Eastern Europe, where the rapid dismantling of the welfare state resulted in high levels of inequality (e.g., Bustikova & Kitschelt, 2009). Additionally, right-wing populism is appealing to victims of modernization by promising to 'undo' or avoid modern developments, such as cross-border migration or gender role flexibility (Minkenberg, 2003). On the left, the perceived gap between the poor and extreme rich offers a breeding ground for the construction of populist divides.

Yet, the main body of empirical research predominately points to the key role of *education* (Ivaresflaten, 2005; Lucassen & Lubbers, 2012; Matthes & Schmuck, 2017; Norris, 2005; Schmuck & Matthes, 2015, 2017). Specifically, lower educated citizens are often most susceptible to the effects of populist messages, although the relative importance of this factor may differ between countries (e.g., Aalberg et al., 2017). There may be three key reasons that explain the role of education. First, the simplified discourse of populism that reduces social problems into black and white issues may appeal most to citizens who might struggle with understanding more complex issues. The technocratic, often nuanced, coverage of information by mainstream communication may be less attractive than simplified populist messages, especially to those who do not follow general political news as closely as others. As a consequence, less knowledge of an issue will decrease the ability to process information, as persuasion research has shown (Biek, Wood, & Chaiken, 1996; Schemer, 2012). Second, populist communication aims to speak to ordinary people as part of these people, using the words of the very people they seek to appeal to. Typically, working-class citizens are addressed with such discourse: those citizens who work hard but perceive they receive only little in return for their labor. These 'ordinary people' referred to in populist communication may therefore most closely resemble citizens at lower levels of education. Third, lower educated citizens may actually perceive themselves as being victimized by processes beyond their control and may feel most fearful of threats that come from outside, such as the influx of migrants on the labor market. Hence, for these lower educated citizens, the threats cultivated by

populist communication may feel most 'real' (Wagner & Zick, 1995; see also Rooduijn & Burgoon, 2018).

Individual Level: Psychological Factors

Although education may play an important role in understanding susceptibility to persuasion through populist messages, the actual psychological process underlying the fears, hopes, and anger of the populist electorate may be central to all demographic groups defined as vulnerable. Most saliently, a recent body of research has identified perceptions of *relative deprivation* as an important driver of populist sentiments (Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016; Spruyt, Keppens, & van Droogenbroeck, 2016; Gest, Reny, & Mayer, 2018). Perceptions of relative deprivation can be defined as citizens' belief that their in-group of ordinary people is relatively worse off than other groups in society. Such sentiments, again, relate to the social identification processes of inclusion and exclusion: the in-group of deprived people perceive they have lost out more than out-groups. This ties in with populist discourse. The culpable elites are blamed for only taking care of their own interests and neglecting the will of the ordinary people they should represent. Instead of responding to the will of their 'own' citizens—the silenced majority of hardworking citizens—they prioritize the needs of others, such as the very wealthy or migrants. Populism thus responds to sentiments of relative deprivation: by assigning blame to the culpable out-groups that deprive the people, populist communication resonates with the losses experienced by the people (e.g., Kriesi et al., 2006; Kübler & Kriesi, 2017; Rodrik, 2018).

The second crucial factor that may need to be taken into account in populism research is the actual *in-group attachment* people experience. Populist discourse constructs an in-group of the ordinary people opposed to various national and/or transnational 'culprit' elites or societal out-groups (e.g., Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). In order for this discourse to stick, receivers of populist messages should experience a sense of belonging to a deprived in-group of ordinary people in the first place. Hence, if people feel distanced from the ordinary people, why should populist messages that blame the elites for the *ordinary* people's problem matter to them? The decisive mechanism of in-group attachment or partisanship has already been demonstrated in research on the effects of blame attribution (e.g., Hobolt & Tilley, 2014; Tilley & Hobolt, 2011), and has been labeled as a perceptual screen. This means that people assign responsibility in a biased way: the in-group is absolved of blame and attributed for successes, whereas the out-group is blamed and not credited for positive outcomes. Recent research on populist communication shows similar results: Attachment to the ordinary people's in-group plays a role in the acceptance of populist blame attributions so that people accept blame frames when they do not feel close to the out-group

attributed blame and reject blame attributed to their in-group (Hameleers et al., 2017a). This also means that the stronger people's attachment to the ordinary people as an in-group, the stronger the perceived threat posed by the elites and societal out-groups. This is in line with empirical findings demonstrating that populist vote intentions of those with a stronger attachment to national identity and a weaker attachment to Europe (the culpable out-group) are affected most by populist blame attributions (Hameleers et al., 2017a).

The mechanisms of deprivation and in-group attachment share a key underlying principle: the attitudinal congruence of the populist messages is a key factor that needs to be taken into account. In other words, populist messages that resonate with people's attachment to a deprived in-group and perceived distance to culpable elites or out-groups are most likely to be persuasive. Attitudinal congruence may also play a key role in the actual selection or avoidance of populist messages. In line with this, empirical research has demonstrated that citizens with stronger perceptions of relative deprivation are most likely to select populist messages (Hameleers, Bos, & de Vreese, 2017b). Moreover, the actual effects of these selected messages are strongest for people who perceive the message as congruent with their prior beliefs.

Individual Level: Informational Factors (Media Use and Perceptions)

In conceptualizing the media-populism relationship, some literature points to the specific media diets of citizens with populist perceptions (e.g., Mazzoleni, 2008). It has, for example, been argued that citizens with populist attitudes are more likely to consume tabloid and entertainment media, whereas they are more likely to avoid hard news and broadsheet media (Hameleers et al., 2017b). In addition, populist attitudes also foster more negative attitudes towards mainstream media (Fawzi, 2018). These media preferences can be explained based on the *resonance* of the core values of tabloid and entertainment media with populist viewpoints. Most centrally, tabloid outlets are assumed to give voice to the ordinary man on the street, circumventing elitist expert sources in news reporting (Hameleers et al., 2017b; Mazzoleni et al., 2003; Krämer, 2014). Associated with this, the style of these media outlets is assumed to revolve around conflict, negativity, dramatization, and emotionalization. This is congruent with populist communication styles that focus on ordinary people while circumventing elites (e.g., Krämer, 2014). Tabloid media should mirror the core values of people with populist attitudes.

The specific media diet of citizens with populist attitudes may thus be explained in the light of cognitive consistency and motivated reasoning (Festinger, 1957; Taber & Lodge, 2006). Citizens select media content and outlets that reassure their prior-held beliefs. As populism and tabloid/

entertainment media align in their core values, it is important to take the media diet of citizens into account when attempting to understand the effects of populist communication on the electorate. The key expectation is that self-selected congruent populist media has the strongest effects on attitudes, emotions, and behaviors. In the longer term, people's prior populist perceptions may motivate the selection of more congruent populist content, with the consequence of polarization or populist filter bubbles (e.g., Hameleers, Bos, & de Vreese, 2018a). But how does the persuasiveness of populist messages depend on the country where the message is selected and processed?

Country-Level Opportunity Structures

From a theoretical perspective, it has been argued that external supply-side structures that differ between countries can have an impact on the effects of populist communication (Stanyer, Salgado, & Strömbäck, 2017). This ties in with extant literature that has defined populism as flexible, adjusting its specific content to the crisis situation it attaches itself to (e.g., Mazzoleni et al., 2003). The actual persuasiveness of populist communication may therefore not only be contingent upon individual-level psychological or demographic factors. Variations in the supply-side opportunity structures may also play a key role in the appeal of populist communication (Esser, Engesser, Matthes, & Berganza, 2017; Stanyer et al., 2017; Hameleers et al., 2018b).

Therefore, it is important to assess the resonance of populist communication with the political, economic, and socio-cultural context in different countries. Several studies point to the fact that there are important differences between European countries based on their historical development, for example, between post-communist and Western European societies (e.g., Bustikova & Kitschelt, 2009; Minkenberg, 2017). Nevertheless, we see at least four key contextual factors central to the resonance of populist communication with real-life opportunity structures: (1) the perseverance of crisis situations on an economic level; (2) the salience of the issue of migration and/or minorities; (3) the success of left-wing and right-wing populist parties (this factor potentially acts as a reinforcing spiral being both cause and consequence); and (4) the levels of trust in institutions. Each of these factors will be outlined in the sections that follow.

First, it can be argued that populist communication—constructing an in-group of deprived people opposed to the corrupt elites—is most effective when there is a problem situation the elites can be credibly blamed for. In other words, in order to instill a sense of threat on the in-group of ordinary people, the 'crisis' of the ordinary people should relate to a 'real' situation that can be interpreted as being caused by the enemies of the ordinary people. Populist discourse would be less convincing if the economic situation of a country were to be, in actual fact, strengthening

(e.g., Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Kübler & Kriesi, 2017; Rodrik, 2018; but also see Rooduijn & Burgoon, 2018).

Citizens living in countries that have suffered severe consequences from the economic recession, for example, austerity measures or rising levels of unemployment, may experience the populist message as congruent with their prior attitudes. They are facing a decline in their welfare, and they suffer from consequences of phenomena beyond their control. Hence, in light of the discussed theories of social identity and individuals' intrinsic desire to maintain consistency and positive self-esteem, situations of economic crisis may stimulate the attributions of blame to out-groups. In order to maintain their positive self-concept of a blameless ordinary citizen, people may scapegoat the elites for causing the decline in their economic situation. Populist communication that shifts blame for economic issues to the elites and extreme-rich groups in society in particular may have the strongest effects in countries that have witnessed the most severe consequences of the economic recession (e.g., Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Kübler & Kriesi, 2017; Rodrik, 2018; Rooduijn & Burgoon, 2018).

Second, the salience of the immigration issue resonates strongly with right-wing populist communication that constructs immigrants and refugees as a threat to the prosperity and/or cultural purity of the native people. Populist messages that blame refugees for depriving the people may be less realistic in countries that have not received a lot of refugees. Although populism taps into *perceived* threats and fears, the cultivation of these threats may resonate less when out-groups are less relevant. Such messages do, however, relate strongly to the situation in countries with rising levels of immigration. In these countries, the perceived influx of refugees may be seen as a real threat to the well-being of the native people. Populist messages may vocalize this threat by highlighting that migrants are responsible for taking the jobs and further pose a threat to the welfare state privileges and cultural superiority of the native people. In other words, perceptions of relative deprivation should be cultivated more in countries with higher numbers of migrants, refugees, and ethnic/religious minorities. Populist communication should consequentially be more effective as it resonates with this attitudinal base (e.g., Rooduijn & Burgoon, 2018).

As a third salient factor, the familiarity of populist discourse may play a role in the persuasiveness of populist communication. Voters in countries with a history of successful populist political parties have become familiar with the specific language of populist communication. Populist communication emphasizes constructions of reality similar to that of populist politicians. Hence, the binary construction of the good people versus the corrupt elites resonates with populist political discourse. Consequentially, against the backdrop of framing and priming theory, populist reality constructions are easily accessible in the minds of citizens living in countries with successful and highly visible populist parties. This argument may, however, contain a partially spurious element that needs to be addressed

in empirical research. It can be argued that populist political parties are successful in various countries because of the presence of the other supply-side opportunity structures discussed here. More specifically, the presence of a severe economic crisis or the increasing influx of refugees may cause *both* the success of populist political parties and the persuasiveness of populist communication. The ‘true’ contextual factor that plays a role may then be the political, cultural, or economic climate rather than the actual success of populist political parties.

As a final country-level contextual factor, the aggregated levels of trust citizens have in established institutions may play a role in the effectiveness of populist communication. It can, for example, be argued that citizens living in countries with declining trust levels in institutions such as political parties, governments, the mass media, banks, or supranational institutions may be attracted most to populist communication that voices anti-establishment sentiment. In other words, populist messages exploit distrust towards institutions by emphasizing that elitist institutions are corrupt and self-interested. This means that, on a country-level, distrust in institutions creates fertile soil for the roots of populism. Countries with higher trust levels should, on the whole, have a lower chance of succumbing to persuasion by the populist messages since the electorate is less likely to perceive the establishment as an actual threat. For citizens in these countries, populist messages that attribute negative qualities to the establishment, most saliently corruption, do not resonate with the overall evaluation of the establishment as trustworthy.

All contextual factors, again, boil down to the same principle: Populist communication should have the strongest effects when it responds to a perceived sense of threat and deprivation. These levels of threat and deprivation can be understood on a country-level by taking important supply-side opportunity structures into account. But which characteristics of populist communication resonate with a perceived sense of threat and deprivation? The next section focuses on message framing of populist political communication.

Communicators: Social Identity Message Framing

Populist messages can be communicated by different kinds of actors (parties, politicians, media and journalists, citizens) and through various channels of communication. They may be found, for example, in party platforms and rally speeches, in TV ads and on party posters, in news reports and opinion pieces, and in social media posts and online forum commentaries (e.g., Aalberg et al., 2017). But wherever it may appear, populist communication entails the framing of political and societal issues in terms of a divide between the ‘good’ ordinary people and the ‘evil’ others (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). These out-groups can be differentiated from the people on a horizontal level (e.g., migrants, Muslims) and on a

vertical level (e.g., political elite, managers). The binary construction of reality—‘us’ versus ‘them’—connects to social identity framing (Mols, 2012). In line with the premises of social identity, individuals can identify with different selves. These different self-concepts may be dependent on the social context (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). To provide a few examples, a context in which individuals are exposed to national symbols, rituals, or ceremonies may trigger the self-concept of belonging to the nation-state. Likewise, a context in which the centrality of the hardworking people’s political will is expressed may promote belonging to a *political* self (Tajfel, 1978; van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). Being flexible or ‘chameleonic’ in nature, populist communication may resonate with various conceptions of the self (Mazzoleni et al., 2003). Populist ideas that attribute blame for the ordinary people’s problems to the ‘corrupt’ elites may, for example, promote identification with a *politicalized* in-group of ordinary citizens who do not feel represented by the government (van Zomeren et al., 2008).

On a more general level, populist communication may promote a self-concept of deprived ordinary citizens: Because the elites do not care for the people they should represent, but rather they prioritize the needs of other groups in society, the ordinary people are relatively worse off than others (Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016; Engesser, Fawzi, & Larsson, 2017). Right-wing populist ideas may additionally trigger a national self-concept of native ordinary citizens who are threatened by foreign elements or national ethnic or religious minorities that compete for social and cultural resources. Irrespective of these contextual differences, populist communication constructs a self-concept of the ordinary people in the context of a situation defined as a severe crisis (e.g., Taggart, 2000). In populist discourse, crisis situations are, for example, defined as the influx of migrants into Europe, austerity measures that deprive ordinary citizens of their welfare privileges, or the crisis of the failed representation by elites in general. By constructing such crisis sentiments, populist ideas consolidate attachment to a homogeneous in-group of citizens who are *victimized* by out-groups.

The construction of a deprived in-group and a salient out-group threat in populist communication is strongly related to the framework of blame or causal responsibility attribution (Gomez & Wilson, 2008; Malhotra & Kuo, 2008; Tilley & Hobolt, 2011). In populism’s simplified discourse, responsibility for the people’s problems is shifted to the corrupt elites or societal out-groups (Vasilopoulou, Halikiopoulou, & Exadaktylos, 2014). Depending on the specific boundary construction in populist communication, out-groups are held responsible for threats posed to the in-group. Populist messages shift responsibility from the ‘good’ people to ‘evil’ others (e.g., Hameleers et al., 2017a; Vasilopoulou et al., 2014). In that sense, populist communication introduces external causes for the crisis situation threatening ordinary people which might even be itself constructed by populists. This strongly resonates with the premises of

social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978) and cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). From a psychological perspective, individuals are assumed to have a strong desire to maintain their positive and consistent self-esteem. This desire can be translated into specific message processing strategies: positive attributes are assigned to the in-group people identify with and negative attributes are assigned to the out-group. Populist communication taps into this processing bias. Specifically, populist ideas highlight that the ordinary people (the in-group) is not responsible for the problems they are facing, whereas the corrupt elites can be identified as external causes (out-group). In that sense, populist communication resonates with individuals' desire to maintain cognitive consonance by consolidating a positive image of the self as belonging to the ordinary people. At the same time, populist communication helps citizens to make sense of political and societal developments by using this attractive 'us versus them' framing of societal issues, which makes attributions of responsibility easier and consequent emotions of anger more likely.

Citizens: Psychological Effect Mechanisms

Many scholars have argued that messages that rely on populist cues are very effective in changing citizens' political opinions or even behavior (Bos et al., 2013; Hamelaers et al., 2017a; Schmuck & Matthes, 2017). Yet, the psychological explanations behind the persuasive appeal of populism are still underdeveloped. Previous research has identified several mechanisms that explain the deeper psychological process of the effects of populist messages. Among those, three theoretical concepts may help to explain the effects of *populist social identity framing*: (1) cognitive priming of social identity; (2) stereotyping; and (3) blame attributions. These processes have crucial implications for citizens' emotional and attitudinal responses, as well as for behavioral outcomes. Therefore, in the next steps, we outline the contributions and intersections of these three concepts to better understand the psychological mechanisms by which populist communication affects receivers' attitudes, emotions, and behavior.

Cognitive Priming of Social Identity

A first basic mechanism by which populist messages may influence citizens is the cognitive priming of social identity. Research on social identity shows that individuals are always part of various social categories and therefore have multiple social identities (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). As these identities often compete and intersect with each other, situational cues, which make certain identity aspects more salient than others, are crucial to the perception of one's belonging to social groups (Major & O'Brien, 2005).

Political messages serve as important situational cues, which prime different aspects of social identity by making certain aspects more salient and

neglecting others (Reinemann, Aalberg, Esser, Strömbäck, & de Vreese, 2017). In line with the literature on trait activation and cognitive priming (Richey, 2012), this means that populist messages that emphasize a binary societal divide of the ‘good people versus the elites’ may prime congruent schemata among those exposed to such messages. Populist communication constructs an in-group of ordinary hardworking citizens, which corresponds to a politicalized image of the self as belonging to a silenced majority of hardworking people (Caiani & della Porta, 2011). It has even been argued that this politicalized in-group is actively constructed by means of communication as an ‘imagined community’ (e.g., Laclau, 2005; Moffit & Tormey, 2014). Populist communication emphasizes that this in-group is threatened: either the elites or horizontal out-groups deprive the ordinary people of what they deserve, be it economically, culturally, or politically (e.g., Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016). In this context, the flexibility of in-group or people constructions in populist communication allows for the freedom of interpretation. Hence, different citizens may feel attracted to different constructions of ‘their’ deprived people, which may influence their subsequent attitudinal, emotional, and behavioral responses, as will be explained later in this chapter.

Stereotyping In- and Out-Groups

Closely related to cognitive priming of social identity is the activation of in-group and out-group stereotypes. Stereotypes can be defined as simplified mental images that help individuals to interpret the diversity of their social reality (Greenwald et al., 2002). When applied to out-groups, these mental pictures are often negative. Populist messages are likely to perpetuate these negative stereotypes by cumulatively priming associations of out-groups, such as the elites or social out-groups, with specific negative attributes (Arendt, 2013; Matthes & Schmuck, 2017). For instance, populist messages that cumulatively blame the national government for rising levels of unemployment among ordinary people may lead to the development of stereotypical memory traces, such as the image of corrupt, self-interested elites that deprive the ordinary people while prioritizing the needs of other groups in society. At the same time, populist messages may also activate positive stereotypes of the ordinary people who are not responsible for the problems they are facing. By marking the boundary between the good ‘us’ and the evil ‘them’, populist communication thus consolidates positive stereotypes of ordinary citizens opposed to culpable others.

Schema theory (e.g., Brewer & Nakamura, 1984) postulates that once an element of a cognitive cluster is primed, the complete extended network of interrelated associations may be activated (e.g., Brewer & Nakamura, 1984). For instance, populist messages that attribute blame to the elites for causing austerity measures in elderly care may prime all the negative stereotypes people have towards the elites: they only take care of themselves,

they fill their own pockets, and, most of all, they do not represent the ordinary people. Once developed, these beliefs can become easily accessible as a result of repeated exposure to populist communication for subsequent political decisions or evaluations of political parties as activation spreads through the cognitive networks of individuals (Higgins, 1996). As a result of repeated exposure to populist communication, the easily accessible stereotypes can be used as heuristic cues for subsequent attitude formation.

Blame Attribution to Out-Groups

Finally, populist messages make blame attributions to out-groups more salient, which is strongly related to the framework of blame or causal responsibility attribution (Gomez & Wilson, 2008; Malhotra & Kuo, 2008; Tilley & Hobolt, 2011). Reasoned from the framework of responsibility attributions, it is argued that crediting and blaming the government are key phenomena in democratic decision-making (e.g., Tilley & Hobolt, 2011). By punishing the government for failures, citizens can hold the established political order accountable for their actions. Attributions of responsibility, like populism, help citizens to comprehend their complex political environment (e.g., Arceneaux, 2006; Cutler, 2004). Importantly, research on attributions of responsibility has demonstrated that citizens' political opinions are guided by information on responsibility. If the national government is blamed for depriving the hardworking citizens, they are more likely to have negative attitudes towards the national government (Hobolt & Tilley, 2014). These explanations help citizens to make sense of political issues by finding external causes for internally experienced problems such as unemployment or perceived injustice. The framework of blame attributions may thus be helpful in understanding the effects of populist communication on attitudes, emotions, and behavior.

Citizens: Cognitive, Emotional, and Attitudinal Responses

Taken together, the three presented mechanisms may first of all result in certain cognitive responses in that they elicit specific perceptions of social reality and attributions of responsibility to certain groups (and institutions). These cognitive responses may then have crucial implications for citizens' further emotional and attitudinal responses. These responses may subsequently result in specific behavioral outcomes. These potential consequences will be explained in the next sections.

Cognitive Responses

Generally, we can assume that *cognitive priming of social identity*, *negative stereotyping*, and *blame attributions* triggered by an 'us vs. them' crisis narrative can enhance perceptions of in-group threat, deprivation,

and/or out-group blame (e.g., Simon & Klandermans, 2001). In fact, research has shown that both the media and politicians have the ability to influence perceptions of real-world conditions, such as the state of the economy (e.g., Lischka, 2015; Bisgaard & Sloothuus, 2018) or certain groups such as immigrants (e.g., Seate & Mastro, 2016). Also, the media may generate diverging views and even misperceptions among different segments of the population depending on the media diet and information environment citizens choose (e.g., Cacciatore et al., 2014). These perceptions and attributions can then elicit certain emotional responses and generate or strengthen certain attitudinal responses.

Attitudinal Responses

First, perceptions of in-group threat, deprivation, and out-group blame may alter citizens' attitudinal responses. When confronted with in-group threats and perceived deprivation elicited by populist communication, people may deal with these threats by adjusting their attitudes toward their in-group and relevant out-groups in order to maintain a positive self-concept (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In-group threats may be alleviated in two ways: either by enhancing positive attitudes toward one's own in-group (*in-group favoritism*), or by devaluing the out-group that poses the threat. Under the perception of threat, members of the out-group are perceived as uniform and more homogeneous than the in-group (*out-group homogeneity effect*), which is related to prejudice and negative out-group attitudes (Judd & Park, 1988). Additionally, blame attributions to out-groups are likely to affect citizens' attitudes. Previous research suggests that attribution of responsibility provides a powerful psychological cue for the formation of favorable attitudes toward the in-group and hostile attitudes toward the out-group (Hobolt & Tilley, 2014; Krämer, 2014). In the context of populism, blame attributions have been found to be a powerful predictor for populist attitudes (Hameleers, Bos, & de Vreese, 2017a).

Emotional Responses

Second, emotional responses are likely to be altered by populist messages. Indeed, experimental research has demonstrated that populist cues elicit emotional responses which drive the persuasiveness of populist communication (Wirz, 2018). By stressing in-group threat and deprivation, populist political communication makes group memberships salient, which may lead to specific kind of emotions that arise when people identify with a group and respond emotionally to events that affect that group: intergroup emotions. Intergroup emotion theory (Smith & Mackie, 2008) suggests that group-based appraisals or interpretations of an intergroup event (e.g., perceived in-group deprivation) determine specific group-based emotions (e.g., anger or resentment). Notions of group-based emotion are

theoretically based in social identity. When people identify with their in-group, or social identity is otherwise salient, they are more likely to make intergroup comparisons and, hence, experience negative emotions in the case of perceived injustice on the basis of their social identity (van Zomeren et al., 2008). Following appraisal theories (Frijda, 1986; Lerner & Keltner, 2000, 2001), specific patterns of such appraisals will trigger specific emotions. These emotions may be experienced on behalf of the group as a function of group membership, irrespective of whether the individual self is affected or not. Individuals who identify with a group may feel that *they* are threatening *us*, or *we* feel angry at *them* (Smith & Mackie, 2008). For example, populist communication portraying a strong out-group that harms the in-group (suggesting that the in-group does not have sufficient resources to cope with the threat) should invoke anxiety or fear. In contrast, when the in-group is appraised as having the resources to deal with the threat posed by an out-group, theoretically, anger is the emotion most likely to be triggered (Smith & Mackie, 2008). Yet, thinking of oneself as part of a particular group or social identity may also elicit positive emotions (such as group-based pride or enthusiasm) that are based on group membership. Populist political communication may contribute to these positive emotions by stressing the virtues of the people (Taggart, 2000). Based on appraisal theories (Frijda, 1986; Lerner & Keltner, 2000, 2001), these intergroup emotions may, in turn, motivate people to take action on behalf of their group; for instance, confronting an out-group, affiliating with in-group members, or supporting government policies that have an impact on entire social groups (Smith & Mackie, 2008).

Citizens: Behavioral Outcomes and Longer-Term Political Consequences

Cognitive, emotional, and attitudinal responses to populist political communication may alter citizens' behavioral outcomes. Reasoned from the premises of social identity framing, the perception of an in-group threat is expected to mobilize citizens (e.g., Ellemers, 1993; Postmes, Branscombe, Spears, & Young, 1999; van Zomeren et al., 2008). Specifically, when people experience that their in-group is disadvantaged by an out-group such as the corrupt elites, they are motivated to engage politically and take collective action on behalf of their deprived in-group (e.g., Simon & Klandermans, 2001). Political engagement and action may take various forms, from interpersonal offline discussions and commenting on social media platforms, to organizing online petitions and taking part in demonstrations. Populist communication, for example, constructs this in-group threat as a severe power discrepancy between the mighty and corrupt elites and the deprived powerless people who are unfairly treated by the established political order (e.g., Van Zomeren et al., 2008). People thus need to take action on behalf of the in-group to avert the threat from outside.

Beyond this, empirical research has also shown that out-group blame attributions can guide citizens' voting intentions (Bellucci, 2014; Marsh & Tilley, 2010). Applied to populism, research has demonstrated that messages that blame the 'corrupt' elites for the problems experienced by ordinary people do indeed affect preferences for political parties (Hameleers, Bos, & de Vreese, 2017c). The mechanism by which populist messages affect populist voting intentions can be explained as follows. Populist messages identify external causes for the problems people are facing, and herewith reassure a positive image of the self. By making complex political matters comprehensible in terms of 'who did it', populist messages affect receivers' perceptions of blame. These blame perceptions activated by populist blame framing may be used as an informational cue when citizens need to arrive at voting preferences (Hameleers et al., 2017c). In other words, populist blame attributions offer important cues for citizens to decide who should be punished and who should be rewarded at the ballot box: the populist politician who promises to restore the purity and prosperity of the people may gain votes by shifting blame to the culpable others. Specifically, populist communication emphasizes that the government should be punished, which lowers people's preferences for coalition parties (Hameleers et al., 2017c). At the same time, these messages are congruent with the ideational core communicated by populist political parties. Blame frames, just like populist politicians, articulate a simplified solution to the people's problems: the elites should be removed, and the only solution to restore the ordinary people's welfare and attachment to the nation is to vote for populist political parties. In line with this mechanism, empirical evidence demonstrates that people who are exposed to populist communication are more likely to vote for populist political parties.

Political Consequences

The outcomes described in Figure 8.1 can be interpreted in their political consequences in the longer term. Most research on the effects of populist communication has looked at relatively short-term effects. Extant research, for example, focuses on the activation or cultivation of populist perceptions, emotional responses, and stereotypical beliefs (e.g., Bos et al., 2013; Hameleers et al., 2017a; Matthes & Schmuck, 2017; Wirz, 2018). Some research has already pointed to more far-reaching democratic consequences, most notably polarization (e.g., Müller et al., 2017) and (populist) voting (Hameleers et al., 2017c). In this chapter, we argue that the mechanisms described in our process model (Figure 8.1) can be extrapolated to understand these longer-term political consequences that have crucial ramifications for democracies throughout the European continent.

First of all, populist messages may cultivate polarization by reinforcing both positive and negative prior perceptions related to populism. This means that people who oppose populist viewpoints may be strengthened

in their opposition as a consequence of exposure to populist communication (e.g., Hameleers et al., 2018a). For these citizens, populist messages may backfire, as they actually result in *lower* agreement with the content compared to exposure to non-populist appeals (e.g., Hameleers & Schmuck, 2017). At the other end of the polarized divide, citizens with congruent populist prior attitudes become strengthened in their congruent convictions (e.g., Müller et al., 2017). In line with the mechanism of motivated reasoning, this means that citizens process political information in line with prior perceptions (Taber & Lodge, 2006). Congruent populist cues are accepted without being subject to critical examination, whereas incongruent populist cues are rejected or counter-argued. This process also explains the feedback loop added in Figure 8.1. Citizens with favorable and stronger pre-existing populist attitudes should be more likely to be positively affected by populist communication; incongruent non-populist prior attitudes should result in negative effects. This means that negative or positive populist prior perceptions (left side of Figure 8.1) may respectively weaken or augment populist attitudes of citizens (right side of Figure 8.1). But how do these processes play out in the informative field?

In Europe's current high-choice, diversified, and fragmented media setting, selective exposure and avoidance may play central roles in the polarizing potential of populist communication (Hameleers et al., 2018a). Specifically, people who only select like-minded news become strengthened in their prior attitudes—meaning that opposing camps or issue-publics become further separated over time (Stroud, 2008). The political consequences of populist communication are thus the result of *repeated* patterns of selection or avoidance. Hence, experimental research has shown that exposure to a single message can have a short-term effect on cognitions, attitudes, emotions, or behavior. In real life, it can be expected that long-term effects are the consequence of habitual exposure. Populist cues thus have a cumulative effect on various outcome variables. Over time, positive in-group and negative out-group stereotypes become more accessible among people who expose themselves to populist sources and populist messages on a daily basis. Likewise, people with prior attitudes that are incongruent with populism may systematically avoid populist content. And if they *do* select incongruent populist content, they may do so to strengthen their disagreement—for example, by finding weaknesses in populist lines of argumentation.

Another political consequence of exposure to populist messages is the cultivation of stronger preferences for populist parties and a strengthened opposition to mainstream parties (Hameleers et al., 2017c) (see Figure 8.1). Hence, when people agree with populism's ideational core that the 'corrupt' elites in their nation are responsible for their deprivation, they should be more likely to punish them at election time. The populist challenger, however, should be rewarded: Populist parties throughout Europe promise to restore the in-group's status and avert their perceived injustice by removing the corrupt elites. In sum, a key political and

democratic consequence of populist communication can thus be seen as *stronger* intentions to vote for populist parties and *weaker* intentions to vote for mainstream parties (Hameleers et al., 2017c).

Conclusion

In the midst of growing public and scientific interest in the effects of populist discourse on society, this chapter aimed to explore the mechanisms by which people are persuaded by populist communication. Although a growing body of research has explored the effects of populist communication on citizens' political opinions, the answers to at least three important questions remain underdeveloped: (1) What are the psychological mechanisms behind the effects of populist communication? (2) Who actually selects populist content and who is persuaded by it? And, finally, (3) how does populist communication resonate with the real-life opportunity structures salient in different countries? Besides extensive theorizing, these questions will need to be answered by large-scale, comparative empirical research, for which this chapter has provided practical recommendations.

Starting with theory, this chapter aimed to provide in-depth insights into the mechanisms behind the persuasiveness of populist communication. Integrating the theoretical frameworks of social identity, blame attribution, and negative stereotyping, the crucial mechanisms behind the effects of populist communication can be understood as the construction of a positive self-image of the blameless people opposed to a culprit out-group of the elite or threatening others. Populist communication constructs a deprived in-group of ordinary people who are not deemed responsible for the collective crisis they are facing. To restore the positive self-concept of the people's community, the in-group of the hardworking people, blame is attributed to external actors: the out-groups that can take on a different shape in populist discourse. Based on the premises of cognitive consonance, populism can be regarded as especially persuasive because it reassures a conception of the good, blameless self while marking the boundary between the self and threatening 'others'.

Yet, this 'populist blame frame' may not be favored by all. The various mechanisms discussed in this chapter can be reduced to one crucial factor: attitudinal congruence. Regarding selection, it can be expected that populist messages are only selected by people with prior attitudes congruent with populist communication. Based on theories of motivated reasoning and selective exposure, people are most likely to self-select into exposure when they agree with the message. More specifically, citizens who feel attached to the in-group of deprived ordinary citizens and those who feel distant toward the elites and/or societal out-groups are most likely to select populist communication. Again, this mechanism is a matter of identity and congruence. Out of a desire to avoid cognitive dissonance, people select messages that agree with their worldviews (e.g., Festinger, 1957).

The actual *persuasiveness* of selected populist messages is, again, rooted in the resonance of the populist message with people's prior attitudes. Identification with the nation-state, Europe, and the deprived ordinary people play a key role in the effects of populist messages. Crucially, populist messages can even result in a boomerang effect among those citizens who do not agree with the populist messages. Importantly, the process by which political attitudes are affected, either in a negative or positive direction, can be explained by trait activation or schema theory. Political perceptions, such as populist attitudes, negative stereotypes, or political participation, are not created by populist attitudes, but rather primed or activated by messages that contain populist arguments.

One other factor is crucial to take into account: the resonance of populist communication with real-life opportunity structures. On a country level, this means that populist communication that blames the economic elites may have the strongest effects on political evaluations in countries that faced the most severe consequences of the European economic crisis. Messages that blame immigrants for the ordinary people's problems may have the strongest effects in countries that recently dealt with the influx of a great number of immigrants, such as Germany. Resonance can also be understood through the success of populist political parties in various countries. Hence, citizens living in countries with a stronger representation of populist parties should be more familiar with populist discourse. Among these citizens, the populist message may activate easily accessible schemata of populist framing.

In the multifaceted nature of populist communication on the European continent, this chapter has offered some recommendations for future research that should aim to dissect the effects of, and mechanisms behind, the spread of populist communication. The chapters that follow take an important next step in populism research by zooming in on an important part of this research agenda. Specifically, the next chapters report on a large-scale empirical project: a 15-country comparative experiment in which different forms of left-wing and right-wing populism are manipulated. In the next chapters, cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral outcomes of exposure to populist messages are investigated. This comprehensive project offers some first answers to key comparative questions that exist in the great body of research that has started to provide explanations for the spread of populism throughout the globe.

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9 Investigating the Effects of Populist Communication

Design and Measurement of the Comparative Experimental Study

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Introduction

The following two chapters in this volume report the findings of a large-scale comparative online survey experiment conducted in 15 countries. Additional results are reported in Hameleers et al. (2018). Designing such comparative research is challenging, and many methodological choices geared at equivalence while being sensitive to country-level differences have to be made in all steps of the process (e.g., Esser & Vliegenthart, 2017). This balance between equivalence and credibility is especially challenging to maintain when manipulating populist communication as key independent variable. Specifically, some countries have been confronted with a large influx of refugees. In other countries, populist actors may more credibly construct threats to the ordinary people on an economic basis (e.g., Aalberg, Esser, Reinemann, Strömbäck, & de Vreese, 2017; Kübler & Kriesi, 2017; Rodrik, 2018; Rooduijn & Burgoon, 2018; see also the introduction to this volume). In other words, the culpable actors in the populist ‘blame game’ vary between settings and may respond more or less credibly to the actual socio-cultural and economic situation in the countries considered. The homogeneity of the people or the corruption of the elites may have a different substance in Italy compared to Germany. Moreover, the consequences of the economic recession have been combated successfully in some countries, whereas Southern European countries are still faced with new economic challenges. The specific timing of the experiment poses yet another set of challenges, as some European countries were either in the midst of a pre-election period, or in the aftermath of already held elections.

This chapter aims to elaborate on these methodological choices, starting with the design of the study and ending with quality checks, and strategies employed to prepare and analyze the large dataset. Finally, the process of data collection in this research project will be translated to specific methodological recommendations for future endeavors that aim

to dissect the effects of (populist) communication on a diversified international electorate.

Design: Manipulating the Divide Between ‘Us’ and ‘Them’

This experimental study aims to extend previous conceptualizations of populist communication by offering a comprehensive manipulation of populist ideas on the left and right wing (e.g., Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Reinemann, Aalberg, Esser, Strömbäck, & de Vreese, 2017; Hamелеers et al., 2018). More specifically, in this experiment, we regard populism as a discursive social identity frame that consists of various elements and their interactions: (1) people centrality cues; (2) anti-elitist cues; (3) left-wing out-group cues; and (4) right-wing out-group cues. The combination of these cues can be extrapolated to six different forms of populism that were manipulated in this experiment (see Table 9.1). Specifically, the 3×2 between-subjects design manipulated: (1) empty populism; (2) anti-elitist populism; (3) right-wing exclusionism; (4) right-wing complete populism; (5) left-wing exclusionism; and (6) complete left-wing populism. These populist conditions were contrasted with control groups that either provided (1) a factual story devoid of anti-other references or (2) a story with anti-elite cues without people centrality references.

The topic of the stimuli was constant across all countries: foreseen decreases in purchasing power were connected to the various out-groups in an online European news setting. The template of all stimuli was based on Euronews. To maintain equivalence, the source was also held similar across conditions and countries: A spokesperson for the fictional foundation FutureNow connected the development of decreasing purchasing

Table 9.1 Design of the comparative experiment

		<i>Blame on out-group</i>	<i>Blame on political elite</i>	
			<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<i>People-centrism</i>	Yes (populism)	No	(1) people-centrist/ empty populism	(2) anti-political elite populism
		On immigrants	(3) right-wing exclusionist populism	(4) right-wing complete populism
		On the rich	(5) left-wing exclusionist populism	(6) left-wing complete populism
	No (no populism)	No	(7) control 1 factual story	(8) control 2 anti-political elite

power to the different populist cues in the various experimental conditions. The decisions of topic and source were driven by the rationale for equal credibility across a diversified European setting: Future declines in purchasing power are not connected to actual noticeable differences in current developments and are vague enough not to be directly connected to the real-life economic situation (i.e., purchasing power is a specific outcome of the economic situation and not related *per se* to actual declines in the economy). Moreover, this development can credibly be connected to scapegoating on different elitist and out-group levels, which is a central requirement for our theoretical mechanisms of social identity framing in the light of populist blame attribution (e.g., Polletta & Jasper, 2001; Van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). The source level was chosen for similar reasons: A fictional foundation may be a credible and non-partisan source in all countries and can be seen as having the issue-specific knowledge to talk about developments in purchasing power and to connect these developments to causes and consequences.

Independent Variables: Types of Populist Communication

The comprehensive conceptualization of populism as social identity frames (see the previous theory chapter by Hameleers et al. in this volume) has resulted in the manipulation of populism's divide between the ordinary people and the culpable others on six different levels. These types of populism will be discussed in more detail here (see Figure 9.1 for examples and Appendix A for all stimuli).

People-Centrist or Empty Populism (Condition 1)

References to the centrality of the ordinary people is the minimal condition for the expression of populist ideas to be identified (e.g., Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Canovan, 1999). In the first condition, references to the ordinary people were manipulated by emphasizing how the in-group of ordinary citizens is victimized by the development of decreasing purchasing power. Due to forces beyond their control, the threat of decreasing purchasing power will become stronger over time. Urgency was highlighted: The article emphasized that action is needed to avert the threat to the common citizens of the respective countries. This people-centrality condition was developed in line with the centrality of in-group injustice and threat in social identity framing (e.g., Gamson, 1992; Polletta & Jasper, 2001) (Figure 9.1).

Anti-Political Elite Populism (Condition 2)

This type of populism connects to the thin-ideology or ideational core of populism (Mudde, 2004). In line with this conceptualization, the articles using this populist cue emphasize the antagonistic divide between the

news.
HOME | NEWS | BUSINESS | PURCHASING POWER WILL DECLINE

Economy
Purchasing power of [nationals] will decline - foundation FutureNow releases new report

According to a new report by FutureNow purchasing power in [country] will decline in the coming years. A spokesperson for the independent foundation that has been monitoring economic developments for years comments on the report:

"The common citizens in [country] need to be made aware of the fact that they will have less money to spend. So many people in [country] are working so hard everyday to have a good life. There is something profoundly wrong when these efforts do not pay off. Action has to be taken now to address this threat to the well-being of our people."

Read more...

news.
HOME | NEWS | BUSINESS | PURCHASING POWER WILL DECLINE

Economy
Purchasing power will decline for [nationals] - foundation FutureNow blames politicians and immigrants in new report

According to a new report by FutureNow purchasing power in [country] will decline in the coming years. A spokesperson for the independent foundation that has been monitoring economic developments for years comments on the report:

"The common citizens in [country] need to be made aware of the fact that they will have less money to spend. So many people in [country] are working so hard everyday to have a good life. There is something profoundly wrong when these efforts do not pay off. It is obvious that politicians and migrants are to blame. Politicians have been too short-sighted, self-serving, and corrupt in recent years. Migrants are too demanding, they exploit our system and are hard to integrate. And still, politicians only take care of the migrants instead of our own people. Action has to be taken now to address this threat to the well-being of our people."

Read more...

Figure 9.1 Example stimuli: People-centrist or empty populism (left) and complete right-wing populism (right) (see Appendix A for all stimuli)

‘innocent’ ordinary people and the ‘corrupt’ and culpable political establishment. Hence, the national politicians in the European countries were explicitly blamed for the threat of declining purchasing power facing the people. Because of their self-interests and because of their failure to represent the ordinary citizens, common national citizens will have less money to spend in the near future. This populist condition further emphasizes that the people are united in their will, good values, and opposition. Specifically, the article states that national citizens have worked hard to combat the former crisis, whereas the elites are blocking their unified goals towards more welfare by letting these efforts go to waste.

Right-Wing Exclusionist Populism (Condition 3)

Moving from the emphasis on vertical to horizontal out-group oppositions, the third level of populism attributed blame to immigrants threatening the ordinary people from *within* (see Jagers & Walgrave, 2007, for a similar conceptualization of exclusionism). Specifically, profiting immigrants were blamed by the spokesperson of the foundation for future declines in the ordinary people’s purchasing power. The threat to the ordinary people was cultivated by emphasizing that immigrants exploit the system and demand too many resources from their host country, which deprives the in-group of ordinary citizens.

Right-Wing Complete Populism (Condition 4)

Populist cues are often combined in a single message (e.g., Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). Indeed, many right-wing populist actors around the globe emphasize the divide between the people and others on both a vertical (i.e., the corrupt political elites) and horizontal (i.e., immigrants) level. Therefore, in this experimental condition, the complete right-wing populist discourse was represented by blaming *both* the political elite and immigrants for future declines in purchasing power: the elites were described as corrupt and self-serving, and migrants were accused of exploiting the system. In addition, the combination of scapegoats was cultivated by highlighting the argument that the elite allow immigrants to profit from the people’s resources—a line of argumentation that ties in with the emphasis of perceived relative deprivation, which is central to populism’s appeal (e.g., Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016) (Figure 9.1).

Left-Wing Exclusionist Populism (Condition 5)

As an important next step in comparative populism research, it is crucial to acknowledge that the people may not only be opposed to out-groups on a right-wing level (e.g., Ramiro, 2017). Especially in a diversified

European setting, many countries have been associated with the rise of populist movements on the left wing (e.g., Greece and Spain; see Aalberg et al., 2017). In this experimental setting, it is therefore important to incorporate the ordinary people's oppositions to 'dangerous' others on the left wing; most saliently, the extreme-rich minorities. In our experiment, the extreme rich (wealthiest 1%) can credibly be scapegoated for declines in purchasing power. This manipulation entailed that the spokesperson of the foundation FutureNow emphasize that the super-rich only care about themselves, filling their own pockets at the expense of the common national citizens who work hard in order to make a decent living.

Complete Left-Wing Populism (Condition 6)

In the final variation of the independent variable, an explicit connection was drawn between the political elite and the extreme-rich out-group. In this condition, populist cues emphasized that both the political elites and the extreme rich are to blame for countries' future decline in purchasing power. Similar to the right-wing complete populist cues, the political elites serve the interest of the extreme-rich minority, rather than the majority of ordinary people they should represent.

Control Conditions (Conditions 7 and 8)

These experimental conditions were contrasted to two control conditions. The first control condition reported on the development of declining purchasing power without attributing blame to out-groups, and without stressing the centrality of ordinary citizens (condition 7). In the other control condition, the political elite were held responsible for the future decline in purchasing power (condition 6). However, they were not blamed for causing threats to the ordinary people. The inclusion of this control condition then allows us to tease out the effect of populist communication compared to the mere presence of anti-elite sentiments.

Experimental Procedures

Sampling and Sample

The programming of the online surveys was centralized and supervised in the Netherlands. One researcher supervised translations and equivalence across countries. Specifically, an English mother template of the online survey was programmed and hosted in Qualtrics and copied in 15 different versions for every country member. The individual country members translated the survey and uploaded their native version of the

stimuli and questionnaire. The country members were also in charge of the data collection. Two international and currently collaborating panel companies were used for 8 of the 15 cases¹: Survey Sampling International and Research Now. There were a number of exceptions. Greece used a panel consisting of a national database of voluntary contributors maintained by the School of Political Sciences, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki; Romania worked with Questia; Norway used the panel of YouGov; and Sweden relied on the panel of the national Laboratory of Opinion Research. Finally, France, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom used a sample from the panel Respondi Germany. Despite the national differences in the selected data collection partners, all companies used the same mixed resources in composing their sample database, and all companies allowed us to compose a quota sample to approach a nationally representative sample on age, gender, and education. To ensure similarity, a strict document with panel company recommendations was composed prior to selecting the panel company. This varied sample allowed us to tease out both contextual country differences and individual-level differences within the countries. After launching the questionnaires, the survey procedure, quotas, and timings were again supervised centrally in the Netherlands to ensure equal procedures across countries.

The final dataset is composed of country samples as follows ($N = 16,549$): Austria ($N = 1,138$), France ($N = 1,192$), Germany ($N = 991$), Greece ($N = 1,116$), Ireland ($N = 951$), Israel ($N = 1,016$), Italy ($N = 1,056$), the Netherlands ($N = 934$), Norway ($N = 1,009$), Poland ($N = 1,368$), Romania ($N = 1,468$), Spain ($N = 1,010$), Sweden ($N = 1,063$), Switzerland ($N = 1,134$), and the United Kingdom ($N = 1,103$). To ensure the quality and validity of the responses, we have removed the answers of 2,050 respondents who did not pay close attention to this dataset (see explication below for the full quality-check procedure). The total number of valid respondents used in the analyses reported in the subsequent chapters is thus 14,499. All data was collected in the first months of 2017. All polling companies received the centrally programmed surveys and were instructed to apply equal standardized procedures regarding recruiting, sampling, stimulus presentation, survey layout, and data collection. Equivalence was further assured by using the same survey flow, randomizations, and layout in the programming of all countries. The final dataset used for the analyses represents a varied sample of citizens in Europe regarding their age ($M = 46.05$, $SD = 15.33$), gender (50% female), low/mid/high education ($M = 2.24$, $SD = 0.71$), political interest ($M = 4.69$, $SD = 1.70$), and left-right ideological self-placement ($M = 5.07$, $SD = 2.55$). The sample characteristics before and after the quality-check procedures are included in Appendix B. The sample composition has also been checked for all individual countries and resembles the countries' distribution of these demographics as closely as possible (see also Hammeleers et al., 2018).

Questionnaire, Stimulus Presentation, and Randomization Checks

All survey experiments were administered in the online environment of the panel companies. In the Qualtrics survey environment, participants first of all gave their informed consent. In the next block of the pre-treatment survey, participants completed items asking for demographics, political preferences, and issue positions. They then proceeded to the treatment blocks. Here, a survey script randomly assigned them to one of the six treatments or to the two control groups. The randomization further ensured that all eight groups were equal in size. In all eight conditions, participants read an online news item in their native language. Based on extensive pilot testing in Greece and Germany, 20 seconds was found to be the absolute minimum reading time for the stimuli. Therefore, participants were forced to read the text for at least 20 seconds. They were, however, free to take a longer period of time to go through the text. After reading the news item, participants proceeded to the post-treatment survey. This survey block included items on the dependent variables and manipulation checks. After having completed the final item of this post-treatment test, participants were debriefed and thanked for their answers. In most countries, financial compensation was provided to all participants who completed the survey.

The randomization check items demonstrate that the eight conditions differ significantly with regards to age, albeit the differences are small ($F(7, 14,357) = 2.18, p = .03$). However, randomization succeeded looking at gender ($F(7, 14,479) = .25, p = .97$), education ($F(7, 14,445) = 1.19, p = .31$), political interest ($F(7, 14,484) = 1.46, p = .18$), and left-right self-placement ($F(7, 13,052) = 1.54, p = .15$). As the minimal differences in the composition of age are not regarded as crucial to the effects measured by the experiment, the age difference, which may be due to chance, is not determined to be problematic.

Manipulation Checks

The post-treatment survey block contained questions on the manipulation of our central independent variable. In this block, respondents were asked to consider the statements mentioned in the news item. After allowing them some time to contemplate the article they had just read, participants were asked to rate the extent to which they thought a number of statements were applicable to the text they had read, on a scale of 1 (this does not apply at all) to 7 (this fully applies). They were explicitly instructed to rate the content of the experimental materials, independent of their own opinions and behaviors. Overall, the manipulations succeeded.

First of all, exposure to the people centrality cue, which displayed the people of the specific country as being deprived and victimized by declining

purchasing power, significantly and substantially increased the likelihood that participants perceived the article as emphasizing the notion of the people as hardworking citizens ($M = 4.86$, $SD = 1.75$) compared to the visibility of people centrality cues across the two control groups ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 1.77$, $b = 1.07$, $SE = .03$, $p < .01$). Second, the anti-elite cue manipulation also succeeded. Specifically, exposure to anti-elite cues made people aware of politicians framed as culprits in the online article ($M = 5.38$, $SD = 1.61$) compared to the control condition without anti-elitist cues ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 1.90$, $b = 1.31$, $SE = .03$, $p < .01$). Similarly, exposure to the left-wing exclusionist cue resulted in the perception that the article blamed the wealthy minority for declines in purchasing power ($M = 5.29$, $SD = 1.69$) compared to the conditions without these populist cues ($M = 3.49$, $SD = 1.87$, $b = 1.81$, $SE = .04$, $p < .01$). Finally, our results provide evidence that participants perceived the article to shift blame to immigrants when they were exposed to the immigrant cue ($M = 5.31$, $SD = 1.83$) as compared to reading articles in which this cue was absent ($M = 2.92$, $SD = 1.80$, $b = 2.40$, $SE = .03$, $p < .01$). To conclude, across all countries, participants recognized the framing of populist cues in the news articles. The manipulations of the proposed typology of populism were thus successful.

Dependent Variables: From Assigning Blame to Populist Voting

To advance existing research on the effects of populist communication, it is important to make a distinction between cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral outcomes as potential consequences of exposure to populist cues (see also the previous theory chapter by Hameleers et al.). In line with this, the next two chapters in this volume offer insights into the effects of populist cues on blame perceptions, stereotypes, populist attitudes, and populist vote intentions. Evidence regarding effects on political engagement are presented elsewhere (Hameleers et al., 2018). The exact conceptualization and measurement of these variables are explained in more detail in the corresponding chapters. The following section will provide a brief overview of the scope of these dependent variables.

Blame Perceptions

The first set of dependent variables concern blame perceptions, which can be regarded a cognitive outcome. Specifically, this first dependent variable aims to tap into message acceptance: Do citizens actually follow suit if populist messages assign blame to the elites or other out-groups? Or do they challenge populist framing? Blame perceptions were measured on different levels of political elite, as well as out-groups on the left- and right-wing. The chapter by Corbu et al. provides more details on the exact measurement of blame perceptions.

Stereotypes

The second perceptual outcome variable concerns stereotypical perceptions of ‘the people’ and ‘the other’. To measure the extent to which participants agreed with traits assigned to various actors in society, a battery of items that tapped into positive and negative associations regarding different groups in society were included. These were all framed as generalized attributes, and participants had to assess the extent to which they agreed with these different traits (e.g., lazy, trustworthy—see the chapter by Corbu et al. for details on measurement).

Attitudes

In the chapter by Andreadis et al., we move on to attitudinal and behavioral consequences of exposure to populist cues. First of all, to assess populist attitudes, participants’ perceived divide between ‘the people’ and ‘the other’ was measured, as well as their belief in a homogeneous in-group of ordinary people. The measures tap into various components of a populist worldview on the receiver-side and are based on existing measurement efforts, such as documented in Akkerman, Mudde, and Zaslove (2014) and Schulz et al. (2018). These measures were extended with items that tapped into the perceptions of a divide between ordinary people and others on a horizontal level, so-called ‘exclusionist’ measures (see the chapter by Andreadis et al. for details).

Voting Intentions

Finally, in the chapter by Andreadis et al., operationalized as the likelihood of voting for political parties, the experiment aims to provide insight into how exposure to populist framing may activate behavioral intentions. Importantly, a distinction between populist and non-populist parties and between left- and right-wing populist parties was made, which allows us to assess the divergent impact of populist cues on voting for the scapegoated political elites or the populist challenger who owns the issue of attributing blame to the elites. The chapter by Andreadis et al. provides extensive details on the categorization of populist parties throughout Europe and the measurement of vote intentions for these various parties.

Quality Control Procedures

Survey research, and experimental research in particular, faces the threat of satisficing (Krosnick, 1991). This means that participants do not make sufficient effort to complete the survey items, and rather see the survey as a task they have to complete in a limited timeframe, receiving payment in return. This problem is especially prominent for surveys that are administered

without the physical presence of the researcher (Baker et al., 2010). Low-quality responses may, in particular, be a threat for large-scale polling firms—such as in this experiment—where people are paid for completing tasks. Hence, the data collection of this experiment is at risk of poor-quality responses due to satisficing (Hillygus, Jackson, & Young, 2014).

Fortunately, extant literature provides a plethora of tools to deal with this issue of inattentive or professional participants (e.g., Baker et al., 2010). Three techniques in particular are relevant for this experimental project: (1) screening out participants with extremely short survey completion times; (2) identifying patterns of straight lining in batteries or matrices of survey questions; and (3) identifying systematic patterns of non-response. In addition to these three measures, the experiment reported in this volume relies on the distribution of responses to the manipulation check items to further assess the attentiveness of participants (Oppenheimer, Meyvis, & Davidenko, 2009).

Regarding the assessment of short completion times, we relied on the ‘scanning threshold’ method (Andreadis, 2012, 2014). This approach aims to offer a realistic minimum completion time by taking the number of characters in the text and the fastest ‘scanning’ reading pace into account. Applying this tool to this experimental study, we found that the bare minimum response time was 412 seconds. Participants with a lower completion time were flagged.

For straight lining as undesired survey behavior, we identified three survey matrices for which similar answers to all items in the grid would not be realistic (i.e., we did not include items expected to load on a single underlying dimension or scale). Again, respondents were flagged if they demonstrated patterns of straight lining (`respdiff` in Stata was used as an analytical tool to identify patterns of straight lining).

The item non-response quality procedure entailed that participants with less than two-thirds of the items completed were flagged for their skipping behavior. The final flag was placed for participants with missing answers on the manipulation check items or an answer pattern that does not perform better than correct answers by chance.

Taken together, these flags provided different indicators of suboptimal response quality. As a decision rule, cases were only deleted if they were flagged in at least two of the four indices. This conservative procedure ensured that we only removed cases when confident that the response pattern was actually poor, and that this decision was not driven by chance. In total, 2,050 responses were removed, and the cleaned dataset consisted of 14,499 respondents.

Analyses

The merged comparative dataset consists of samples that were collected in 15 different countries. For this reason, the data has a hierarchical

structure: observations on the individual level (the participant) are nested within countries. To test the effects of populist cues on our dependent variables in all country samples simultaneously while controlling for the dependency of the observations on the country-level, we ran multilevel models using the software package Stata. Although it may be argued that 15 cases on the second level is a relatively low number for multilevel models, we have established the validity of estimates according to various standards (i.e., non-zero variance, normality assumptions). Moreover, individual-level differences can validly and reliably be estimated when the sample size within countries is high (see Bryan & Jenkins, 2016 for a discussion). In all the mixed-effects models reported in the following book chapters, the intra-class correlation coefficients varied between .07 and .21. This index shows that more than 7 percent of the variability in the dependent variables are due to the country level in which the individuals are nested. At the same time, the within-country differences are still much larger than the between-country differences. The analyses per country (see the chapters by Corbu et al. and Andreadis et al.) were conducted using OLS regressions.

Conclusion

Conducting large-scale comparative research is not without its problems. Issues of equivalence of item wordings, sample composition, and applicability of the study to diverging contexts pose a challenge to any kind of comparative research (e.g., Esser & Vliegenthart, 2017). Experimental comparative research poses additional challenges in the stages of design and measurement. In particular, the process of developing equally credible yet context-neutral stimuli that connect to the socio-economic developments in a diversified European setting has been one of the major challenges in the experimental research described in this volume. However, the European setting offers some form of unity in the availability of European news settings and the extent to which real-life economic situations can be attached to all countries in Europe. Based on this common ground, the experiment reported in the next chapters of this volume manipulated a European-wide development of declining purchasing power using an unbiased, relatively neutral fictional European foundation as a source.

The experimental design has different limitations that can be translated into specific recommendations for future comparative experiments. First of all, the logistic procedures of centralizing programming and data collection can further be improved by hiring one international panel company that collects data in all countries in exactly the same timeframe using exactly the same recruiting procedures. Although this research used similar companies that were carefully instructed to use the same procedures, some minor differences in approaches have posed challenges to the post-data collection procedures of data quality and equivalence checks.

Moreover, the selection of a fitting topic in 15 countries that can credibly be used to assign blame to all out-groups may have resonated stronger with some countries than others. Hence, the left-wing out-group of the extreme rich may fit to a stronger extent in Greece and Italy than in Germany and Austria (see also the chapters by Corbu et al. and Andreadis et al.). In the latter countries, the anti-immigration cue may resonate stronger with the dominant discourse in media and society. Still, the ideational core of populism—emphasizing the divide between the ordinary people and the culpable elites—has been salient in all settings, and thus provides common ground for understanding the effects of populist communication in different settings. Future comparative research may further tailor the manipulations and topics to enhance the resonance with the actual common ground in discourse prevalent in media and society. Hence, in line with literature on the mobilizing potential of social identity frames, the populist stimuli should provide (1) a connection to the perceived deprivation of the electorate; (2) a credible scapegoat for this threat; and (3) appropriate and easily accessible tools to overcome this threat (e.g., Hameleers et al., 2018; Polletta & Jasper, 2001). An implication of these considerations is that a comprehensive manipulation of populist cues on the left and right may not be equally credible across different countries, and therefore not equally persuasive. A pragmatic solution to this problem is to always measure and control for the credibility and perceived relevance of the experimental stimuli.

The design of this experiment aims to provide comprehensive insights into the effects of populism in the setting of a great variety of successful left-wing and right-wing populist parties in Europe, ranging from more successful left-wing populism in Southern Europe (i.e., Greece) and more successful anti-immigration right-wing populism in the western part of the continent (i.e., Austria and the Netherlands). Hereby, this study extends research that either focused on a subset of populist elements and/or countries (e.g., Hameleers, Bos, & de Vreese, 2017). In this unique comparative experiment, populist oppositions between the people and the ‘others’ are manipulated on two levels: the ‘vertical’ elites and ‘horizontal’ out-groups on both the left (the rich) and right (the immigrants). Moreover, for the first time in populist communication research, the effects of these populist identity frames are studied on cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral outcomes.

Note

1. This is a more detailed description of the data collection procedures as compared to the brief discussion included in Hameleers et al. (2018).

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10 Cognitive Responses to Populist Communication

The Impact of Populist Message Elements on Blame Attribution and Stereotyping

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Introduction

Populism, once seen as the unnatural, terrifying ‘spectre haunting the world’ (Ionescu & Gellner, 1969, p. 1), has become a commonly accepted political ‘thin-centered ideology’ (Mudde, 2004), a discursive frame (Aslanidis, 2016), a political style (Moffitt, 2016), a strategy (Barr, 2009), a frame (Caiani & della Porta, 2011), a discourse (Laclau, 2005), a language (Kazin, 1998), etc., all embedded in the mainstream politics of (not exclusively) Western democracies—in short, a *zeitgeist* (Mudde, 2004). Regardless of the perspective, the core of populism resides in the moral Manichean distinction between the ‘good people’ and the ‘corrupt elites’ who fail to represent the will of the ordinary people. Building on this common denominator, the most commonly elaborated construction of various ‘species’ of populism revolves around dichotomous dyads of the blameless people and culprit ‘others’ (out-groups) (Canovan, 1999; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Mudde, 2004; Taggart, 2000).

Aalberg, Esser, Reinemann, Strömbäck, and de Vreese (2017) make a strong argument in favor of studying populism, taking into account three main actors involved in the political populist communication: the political actors, the media, and the citizens. This study responds to the ‘calls by scholars who have emphasized that the effects of media populism on the receiver side of the populist discourse should be studied more thoroughly’ (Hameleers, Bos, & de Vreese, 2017a, p. 871).

The burgeoning literature on the effects of populist communication spans effects on attitudes, emotions, support for leaders, and voting intentions (theory chapter by Hameleers et al. and Andreadis et al. in this volume; de Vreese, Esser, Aalberg, Reinemann, & Stanyer, 2018). It

has been demonstrated in communication effects studies, using different designs and examining different country cases, that populist cues can be effective in changing people's political opinions and behavior (see the theory chapter by Hameleers et al. in this volume for an overview of the psychological mechanisms behind these effects). However, these effects are not universal, neither across citizens nor across (political) contexts. Moreover, the attention paid to the underlying mechanisms of effects has been insufficient.

This chapter attempts to shed light on citizens' cognitive responses to populist messages, taking into account specific effects of populist messages across 15 countries. It investigates how populist message strategies affect blame attributions and stereotypes related to the in-groups and out-groups, i.e., political actors, immigrants, and the wealthy. As outlined in the previous theory chapter (Hameleers et al., in this volume), these are key effect mechanisms of populist communication, but are also still under-studied.

Theoretical Background

This chapter highlights the cognitive impact of populist framing of media messages on attributions of blame and responsibility related to various social groups (Hobolt & Tilley, 2014; Iyengar, 1994). Additionally, we examine the impact of populist communication on the activation of stereotypical cognitions in people's minds (Dixon, 2008; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000; Schemer, 2012; Valentino, Hutchings, & White, 2002).

Populist media framing can produce effects through patterns of interpretation (Scheufele, 1999), particularly focused on a 'causal interpretation' and a 'moral evaluation' (Entman, 1993). Building on the previously defined populist frame as 'us vs. them' (Caiani & Della Porta, 2011), in this study we distinguish between various populist frames, adding the perspective of the exclusionist populist communication (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). Thus, we will be further referring, in Jagers and Walgrave's terms, to one *vertical* out-group, the culprit politicians, and two *horizontal* out-groups, the immigrants (for right-wing populism) and the wealthy (for left-wing populism). In line with cognitive priming literature (see Richey, 2012), we argue that, by emphasizing a binary divide between the 'good people' and the 'corrupt elites' (or culprit immigrants or wealthy for that matter), populist messages may prime similar schemata in people's minds when exposed to these types of messages. Specifically, by framing political problems as a battle of the 'evil' elites or out-groups against good people, populist communicators clearly suggest these actors to be the root of all evil. Put differently, simplified black-and-white news portrayals of social problems as being unambiguously caused by political actors and/or out-groups such as immigrants or refugees impose corresponding causal attributions in the news audience.

Even though populism revolves around blame as a key feature of populist communication and at the core of populist strategies (Aalberg et al.,

2017), studies have only recently begun to examine blame attribution in response to populist communication (for exceptions see Hameleers et al., 2017a; Hameleers, Bos, & de Vreese, 2017b; Hameleers, Bos, & de Vreese, 2018a). The assignment of responsibility (or blame) ‘reflects a disagreement between the actor and the perceiver. To the extent that the two individuals share a common view of morality, the perceiver’s assignment of blame is a claim that the actor has done something for which he or she ought to be ashamed’ (Shaver, 2012, p. 156). By making blame attributions to out-groups, populist messages make implicit or explicit causal links available in public discourse and in the minds of citizens. Such causal links are readily used by citizens when judging the performance of a government, institution, or a group (*priming effect*). Also, such causal links are in part already present in citizens’ perceptions and are activated, or even introduced, through populist messages.

In this chapter, we first investigate the potential for populist messages to affect message-congruent blame attributions. We expect that messages in which a particular out-group is blamed enhance blame attributions to that respective out-group (for previous studies using blame attribution as dependent variables, see Marsh & Tilley, 2010; Tilley & Hobolt, 2011). Therefore, if in populist anti-elitist messages the *political elite* are blamed for problems of the common citizens (see also the chapters by Blassnig et al., Maurer et al., and Esser et al. in this volume), we expect citizens who are exposed to these messages to attribute responsibility to the political elite more than the citizens who are not exposed to such a message (*H1*). Likewise, we expect a similar effect on immigrant blaming when, in a right-wing populist message, immigrants are blamed (*H2*). Finally, blaming of the wealthy for a social problem in a left-wing populist news story is likely to elicit blaming wealthy people in message recipients (*H3*).

Additionally, previous research on populist communication effects has seldom looked at the combined effects of blaming more than one out-group on people’s perceptions about who is responsible for a negative situation (blame attributions) (but see Hameleers et al., 2018a; Wirz et al., 2018). Blaming more than one group in populist communication, e.g., politicians and immigrants (in right-wing populist messages) or the wealthy (in left-wing populist messages), can have different effects. As argued in the theory chapter by Hameleers et al. in this volume, populist framing of media messages resonates with social identity theory; thus, components of in-group threats, a credible scapegoat, and efficacy are seen as predictors of social identity framing. However, arguments about the threats of various out-groups in populist messages could be more credible in some contexts and in some countries. On the one hand, blaming two out-groups can enhance blame perceptions of either group in people’s minds because the social problem may appear worse since two groups may have conspired against the good people. On the other hand, blame may be dissipated between the two different out-groups, possibly

because it is interpreted differently (the *vertical* out-group of the culprit politicians may be considered as unwilling to represent the interests of the people, whereas the *horizontal* out-group of immigrants or the wealthy may be perceived as competitors for material resources). Since we cannot know whether there is an additive effect or not, we treat this as a research question: What is the combined effect of blaming both politicians and immigrants (*RQ1*), or both politicians and the wealthy (*RQ2*), on blame perceptions of the respective groups among citizens?

In the next step, we focus on *stereotyping* as an outcome of exposure to populist communication. Stereotypes can be defined as ‘simplified mental images that help individuals to interpret the diversity of their social reality’ (Matthes & Schmuck, 2017, p. 560), or judgmental heuristics used to simplify various cognitive tasks (Bodenhausen & Wyer, 1985). As argued in the theory chapter by Hameleers et al. (in this volume), populist messages are likely to perpetuate these often negative stereotypes by priming associations of out-groups such as the elites or minorities with specific negative attributes (Arendt, 2013a; Matthes & Schmuck, 2017).

Building on schema theory (Brewer & Nakamura, 1984), most modern approaches to understanding the mechanism of stereotype formation and enhancement argue that there are two stages of the stereotyping process, *association* and *activation*, and two types of stereotypes, *implicit* and *explicit* (Devine, 1989; Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006; Greenwald et al., 2002; Strack & Deutsch, 2004). The association stage is characteristic of the automatic processes of retrieving information from memory through familiar nodes (concepts) and links (associations) (Greenwald et al., 2002, p. 4), in other words, the inevitable activation of mental associations in memory (Amodio & Devine, 2006; Strack & Deutsch, 2004). Therefore, implicit stereotypes are considered an outcome that could (or could not) further be expressed as overt judgment: this is the activation stage, which leads to explicit stereotypes. In contrast to the association process and the (inescapable) formation of implicit stereotypes, explicit stereotypes are the results of a cognitive conscious process, which finally leads individuals to decide whether or not to use stereotypes in overtly expressed judgments (Greenwald et al., 2002; Strack & Deutsch, 2004). In this study we focus on effects on *explicit stereotypes* about the in-group (the people) and different out-groups (the politicians, the immigrants, the wealthy).

Stereotypes as dependent variables have been studied mostly in association with topics such as crime (Akalis, Banaji, & Kosslyn, 2008; Arendt, 2013b; Dixon, 2008), video games (Burgess, Dill, Stermer, Burgess, & Brown, 2011), racial attitudes (Valentino et al., 2002), etc., but little attention has been paid to derogatory portrayals of various out-groups in populist messages. The notable exceptions (Arendt, Marquart, & Matthes, 2015; Matthes & Schmuck, 2017) focus on right-wing populist political ads. At the same time, most studies focusing on stereotype activation show effects on implicit stereotypes, but not on explicit ones

(Arendt et al., 2015; Brown Givens & Monahan, 2005; Burgess et al., 2011).

In the context of populist political communication, the function of stereotypes can be two-fold. It can feed into the negative stereotypes of out-groups, but it can also feed into the positive stereotype of the in-group, the people, which in populist rhetoric is the positive beneficiary. In line with theorizing on media priming, we expect a populist message, which attributes positive characteristics to the in-group of the common people, to positively enhance the stereotypes of this in-group (*H4*), whereas blaming the political elite, immigrants, and the wealthy for social problems in news stories will negatively affect the stereotypes of these out-groups, respectively (*H5–7*). Additionally, we investigate whether or not blame attribution to more than one out-group in media messages could yield into more (or less) stereotyping of various out-groups (*RQ3*). Will blaming more than one out-group subsequently enhance stereotypes associated with primarily one or both groups, or dissipate the effect entirely? Moreover, would media messages cueing people centrality and blame of various out-groups rather enhance stereotypes by priming the moral gap between the ‘good’ and the ‘evil’, or would these associations be perceived as too far-fetched and dismissed as exaggerated (*RQ4*)?

Method

Experimental Design

To test our hypotheses and to answer the research questions, we ran a comparative experiment in 15 countries in which we varied the presence and absence of the in-group—the ordinary people (people centrality cues)—as well as three out-groups—the political elite (anti-elitist cues), immigrants (right-wing out-group cues), and the wealthy (left-wing out-group cues). In all 15 countries, the design of the experiment was identical. The setup was a 3×2 between-subjects experiment with two control groups. Specifically, we investigated the differential impact of a focus on the national in-group and of the blaming of vertical (political elite) and horizontal (the immigrants and the wealthy) as out-groups in a news article (see the previous chapter by Hameleers et al. for an overview of the experimental design). The topic was the alleged decrease of purchasing power in the respective countries. This social problem was raised by a representative of a fictional foundation. Both the topic and the source of the populist messages were held constant across all conditions and in all countries.

Sample

The sample of citizens in the 15 countries was diverse with respect to their level of education and age ($N_{\text{Total}} = 16,549$). After cleaning the data

(see Hameleers, Andreadis, and Reinemann in this volume for additional details), 2,050 low-quality responses were removed, resulting in a total of 14,499 respondents.¹ The data was collected in the first months of 2017 by both international and national research organizations, which were thoroughly instructed with regards to the recruiting procedures, sampling, stimulus presentation, survey layout, and data collection. The final dataset represents a sample of European citizens with diverse characteristics (see Appendix B for an overview of the respondents' background characteristics by country).

Procedure

The experiments were conducted online. All participants gave their informed consent and filled in the pre-test part of the questionnaire (demographics, control variables). Afterwards they were randomly assigned to one of eight conditions. In each of these conditions, participants were instructed to read a news article for at least 20 seconds (for a report on randomization and manipulation checks, see Hameleers, Andreadis, and Reinemann in this volume). The post-test part of the survey contained the dependent variables and manipulation checks, as well as a debriefing and message of thanks.

Stimuli

The mother versions of the stimuli were produced in English. They were translated by native speakers in all countries after thorough discussion about potential inconsistencies and cultural specificities. The control stimulus consisted of a piece of news allegedly published on a fictional online newspaper (news.com), which closely mimicked the euronews.com template—a common familiar template in all European countries. The story referred to a future decline of the purchasing power in the country, reported by the fictitious foundation FutureNow, with a picture of an empty wallet accompanying the text. In the six treatment conditions, the typology of populist communication as outlined in the theoretical framework was manipulated (see also Hameleers, Andreadis, and Reinemann in this volume). Two additional conditions served as controls (see Appendix A for all stimuli).

Measures

Blame Perceptions

The first set of dependent variables concern blame perceptions. Specifically, respondents were asked who they deemed to be responsible for causing the future economic downfall on a scale ranging from 1 (not at

all responsible) to 7 (fully responsible). We distinguish between different causal agents that the participants could blame: citizens from their own country ($M = 3.97$, $SD = 1.64$), immigrants or refugees, which were summarized to form a single scale ($r_{SB} = .893$, $N = 14,445$, $M = 3.42$, $SD = 1.76$), the EU ($M = 4.75$, $SD = 1.70$), the national government or national politicians, which were summarized to form a single scale ($r_{SB} = .906$, $N = 14,470$, $M = 5.37$, $SD = 1.56$), and the wealthy ($M = 4.50$, $SD = 1.66$).²

Stereotypes

As previously mentioned, we considered explicit stereotypes only. This construct was measured by using four items referring to evaluative traits of four different groups: ‘most people in country X’, ‘most politicians’, ‘most wealthy’, and ‘most immigrants’. In addition, it was noted that ‘descriptions like this are bound to be sweeping generalizations. Nonetheless, they do often seem to contain some element of truth’. The four traits were ‘trustworthy/untrustworthy’, ‘hardworking/lazy’, ‘honest/dishonest’, and ‘sympathetic/unsympathetic’. Again, we used 7-point rating scales. For each group a stereotype measure was created based on the four items, with lower values indicating more negative stereotypes and higher values indicating more positive stereotypes. The four items were targeted at the people loaded on the same factor, with factor loadings ranging from .79 to .88 ($\alpha = .86$, $M = 4.71$, $SD = 1.23$). The trait items referring to the political elite also loaded on one single factor, with factor loadings ranging from .87 to .93 ($\alpha = .93$, $M = 3.03$, $SD = 1.51$). The same measurements showed one factor for the wealthy stereotypes (factors loadings ranging from .74 to .91, $\alpha = .87$, $M = 3.72$, $SD = 1.34$), and for immigrants with factor loadings ranging from .88 to .94 ($\alpha = .93$, $M = 3.95$, $SD = 1.48$).

Analyses

The dataset has a hierarchical structure in the sense that observations are nested within countries. Therefore, the general results are analyzed by running multilevel (mixed-effects) models in Stata, with intra-class correlation coefficients varying between .07 and .21, which shows that more than 7 percent of the variability in the dependent variables is due to the country level (see the methods chapter by Hameleers, Andreadis, and Reinemann in this volume for a justification of using multi-level models with a relatively small number of Level 2 units). Yet, within-country differences are still much larger than between-country differences. Analyses per country were conducted using OLS regressions. The OLS regressions used blame perceptions for the individual groups as dependent variables and populist cues as independent variables. Similar to the multilevel analysis,

main effects for people-centrism cues, anti-elite cues, anti-immigrant cues, and anti-wealthy cues, as well as interactions of anti-elite/anti-immigrant and anti-elite/anti-wealthy cues, were taken into account in the respective models.

Results

Blame Perceptions

The subsequent section looks first at the distribution of means across countries. Then, we test the hypotheses and answer the research questions. General means of blame attributions show considerable variation across countries (Figure 10.1; see Appendix C for exact mean values). There is an almost general consensus about blaming politicians the most and immigrants the least. Thus, there seems to be a normative tendency to blame those in power for social problems. The highest gap between blame attribution for the two out-groups is observed in Greece, whereas the lowest difference is registered in Sweden. Moreover, France is the only country in which immigrants are viewed as more responsible than the people for the decrease of the purchasing power described in the news story. Even though the variables were measured in the post-test part of the questionnaire, they offer a general overview of the subject matter.

Table 10.1 shows the impact of the different cues used in populist communication—people centrality, anti-elite (or anti-politicians), left-wing out-group cues (or anti-wealthy), right-wing out-group cues (or anti-immigrant)—on blame perceptions in the public.

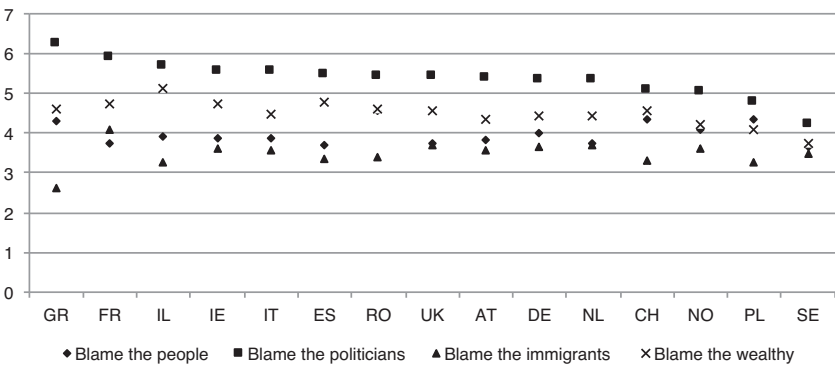


Figure 10.1 Blame perceptions by country and group (country-by-country analysis; ascending order by blame attribution to politicians)

Notes: Mean values for blame perceptions by country and group based on scales from 1 (not at all responsible) to 7 (fully responsible).

Table 10.1 Effects of populist cues on blame perceptions (multilevel model; unstandardized coefficients; standard errors in parentheses)

	Model 1: <i>Blaming the people</i>	Model 2: <i>Blaming politicians</i>	Model 3: <i>Blaming immigrants</i>	Model 4: <i>Blaming the wealthy</i>
Intercept	3.97 (.08)**	5.28 (.12)**	3.45 (.09)**	4.41 (.09)**
<i>Level 1 fixed effects</i>				
People centrality cue	.01 (.04)	.04 (.04)	-.05 (.04)	-.02 (.04)
Anti-elite cue	.01 (.04)	.05 (.03)	-.03 (.04)	.03 (.04)
Anti-immigrant cue	-.05 (.05)	.01 (.05)	.17 (.05)**	.03 (.05)
Anti-rich cue	-.10 (.07)	-.02 (.05)	-.07 (.05)	.30 (.05)**
Anti-elite cue × anti-imm. cue	.02 (.06)	-.01 (.06)	.17 (.07)*	.01 (.06)
Anti-elite cue × anti-rich cue	-.10 (.06)	.09 (.06)	.11 (.07)	-.01 (.06)
<i>Random effects</i>				
Country-level variance	.07 (.03)**	.20 (.08)*	.09 (.03)*	.10 (.04)*
Individual-level variance	2.61 (.03)**	2.26 (.03)**	3.02 (.04)**	2.69 (.03)**
Intra-country correlation	.03 (.01)*	.08 (.03)**	.03 (.01)*	.03 (.01)**
Log likelihood	-27,505.38	-26,473.54	-28,498.81	-27,692.65
N	14,474	14,470	14,445	14,454

Notes: Positive coefficients for Level 1 fixed effects mean that the respective populist message cues, or their interactions, significantly increase blame attributions to the respective groups. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Blaming the People

It was expected that simply portraying the people as victims of an economic problem (i.e., people-centrism) would represent a heartland cue that can positively affect the perception of the people or de-emphasize blame attributions of the people. However, a news story about an economic problem with a people-centrality cue without blaming any group does *not* affect blame perceptions of the people. Other cues that blamed immigrants, politicians, or the wealthy do *not* affect blame attributions of the people either. Finally, the interaction of anti-elite blaming and blaming of either immigrants or rich people does not result in changes of blame perceptions of the ordinary people. Thus, blaming of social groups in the news for a future crisis from which the ordinary people would suffer does not change blame perceptions of this group.

Blaming Politicians

The results of Model 2 show that exposure to news stories that blame politicians or the government for economic problems does not affect blame perceptions of politicians in the public. This finding is inconsistent with our hypothesis. News blaming of politicians does not translate, in any countries, into blaming of the political elite. In addition, there were no interaction effects of anti-elite blaming with scapegoating of immigrants or wealthy people. Finally, blame shifting to politicians does not affect the blame perceptions of other social groups.

Blaming Immigrants

In line with our assumption, news stories about an economic problem that is attributed to immigrants cause readers to blame immigrants for this economic problem. The adoption of this blame frame in the news story fully materializes in France and Ireland (Figure 10.2). Specifically, blaming immigrants in the news compared to blaming other groups, or nobody, increases blaming by more than two-thirds of a scale point on the responsibility rating scale. Remarkably, no negative effects are apparent in some of the Southern European countries that have become the first destination of migrants (e.g., Greece, Italy) or in other Central and Northern European countries that have taken in a high number of immigrants per capita in recent years (e.g., Austria, Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands). In Sweden, blaming immigrants or refugees for economic problems in the news even backfires. Put differently, exposure to a news article that blames immigrants for future economic problems results in *less* blame attributed to this group. Blaming immigrants in the news does not affect blame attribution to other groups such as the people, politicians, or the wealthy. The findings also suggest an interaction effect of news stories that

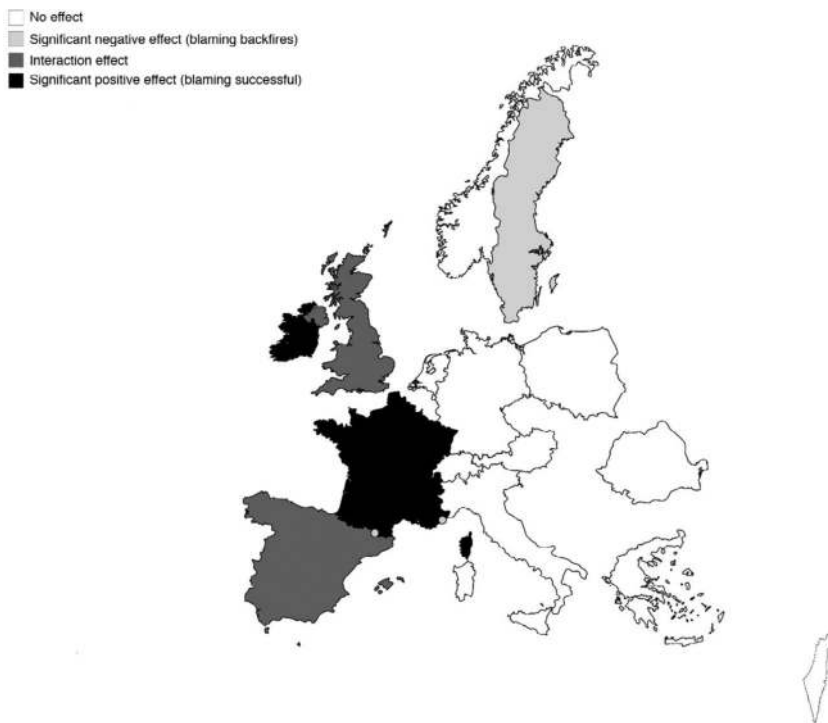


Figure 10.2 Effects of populist cues blaming immigrants and refugees on attributions of blame toward immigrants and refugees (country-by-country analysis)

Notes: Information on effects of blaming immigrants and refugees on blame attribution to immigrants and refugees per country based on country-by-country OLS regression analyses with blame perceptions as dependent variables, and populist cues and specific interactions of populist cues as independent variables.

blame immigrants *and* the political elite on blame perceptions. This result indicates that blame perceptions are most pronounced after reading news articles that blame immigrants *and* politicians as compared to blaming just one group or no group at all. This finding is most pronounced in Spain and in the UK, where no main effect occurred.

Blaming the Wealthy

News blaming of wealthy people resonates well with the audience, lending support to our third hypothesis. Specifically, exposure to news stories that blame rich people for future economic problems increases perceived blame of this group in the public. This finding receives support in six



Figure 10.3 Effects of populist cues blaming wealthy people on blame perceptions of the wealthy (country-by-country analysis)

Notes: Information on effects of blaming the wealthy on blame attribution to the wealthy per country based on country-by-country OLS regression analyses with blame perceptions as dependent variables, and populist cues and specific interactions of populist cues as independent variables.

out of 15 countries, i.e., Austria, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, and the Netherlands, whereas in all other countries no effects are detected (Figure 10.3). The largest effect size (two-thirds of a scale point on the blaming scale) are found in Germany and Austria. However, we found no interaction effect of the anti-wealthy cue and anti-elite cue on blame perceptions of rich people. Finally, blaming rich people in the news for future economic problems does not affect blame attributions of other social groups.

Stereotypes

The subsequent analyses look at whether attributions of blame for a specific problem depicted in a news story are generalized to the evaluation and

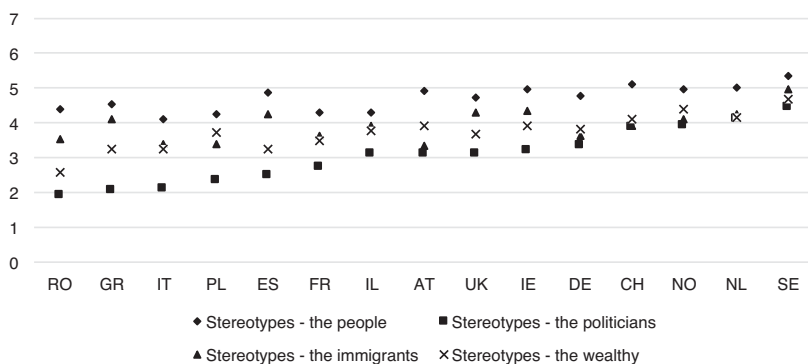


Figure 10.4 Stereotype perceptions (country-by-country analysis; ascending order by negative stereotypes of politicians)

Notes: Mean values for stereotype perceptions by country and group based on an index of four items asking whether the respective groups in a country are perceived as ‘trustworthy/untrustworthy’, ‘hardworking/lazy’, ‘honest/dishonest’, ‘sympathetic/unsympathetic’. Based on 7-point rating scales with lower values indicating more negative stereotypes and higher values indicating more positive stereotypes.

perception of the whole group. Before testing the hypotheses, a quick look at the means per country is useful. As a general observation, the mean of the stereotypes scales show differences across countries (Figure 10.4; see Appendix D for exact mean values), with a clear leaning towards perceiving national politicians most negatively. Politicians are most negatively stereotyped in Italy, Greece, and Romania. The people are perceived in the most positive way in countries such as the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Sweden. These findings mirror the results on blame perceptions.

In the next step, we analyzed whether group cues in the news affect stereotyping of this specific group in the public. The findings of a multi-level model that includes the news cues as predictors of stereotypes are depicted in Table 10.2.

Stereotyping of the People

Participants reading a news article which portrayed the people as victims of the future decline of purchasing power perceive the people more stereotypically positive than in the control condition, which is in line with *H4*. Individual country analyses reveal that this effect occurs mainly in Germany and Poland, but is absent in the other countries. Other news cues did not affect stereotypes of the people as being virtuous. Finally, there is no evidence of any interaction effects of group cues on stereotypes of the people.

Table 10.2 Effects of populist cues on stereotype perceptions (multilevel model; unstandardized coefficients; standard errors in parentheses)

	Model 5: Stereotypes of the people	Model 6: Stereotypes of politicians	Model 7: Stereotypes of immigrants	Model 8: Stereotypes of the wealthy
Intercept	4.68 (.09)**	3.11 (.20)**	3.99 (.12)**	3.79 (.13)**
<i>Level 1 fixed effects</i>				
People centrality cue	.09 (.03)**	-.04 (.03)	-.01 (.03)	.02 (.03)
Anti-elite cue	-.04 (.03)	-.03 (.03)	-.02 (.03)	-.02 (.02)
Anti-immigrant cue	-.01 (.04)	.04 (.04)	-.11 (.04)**	.01 (.03)
Anti-rich cue	-.07 (.04)	-.03 (.04)	.01 (.04)	-.18 (.03)**
Anti-elite cue × anti-imm. cue	.03 (.04)	.02 (.05)	.03 (.06)	
Anti-elite cue × anti-rich cue	.07 (.05)	.01 (.05)	.05 (.05)	
<i>Random effects</i>				
Country-level variance	.13 (.05)**	.56 (.21)*	.19 (.07)**	.25 (.09)**
Individual-level variance	1.394 (.02)**	1.69 (.02)**	2.00 (.02)**	1.53 (.02)**
Intra-country correlation	.08 (.03)*	.25 (.07)**	0.09 (.03)**	.14 (.05)**
Log likelihood	-22,842.47	-24,276.12	-25,282.92	-23,488.43
N	14,391	14,402	14,300	14,372

Notes: *Negative* coefficients for Level 1 fixed effects mean that the respective populist message cues or their interactions significantly increase *negative* stereotypical perceptions of the respective groups. Stereotype indices were inverted to make them congruent with the negative cues in the manipulation. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Stereotyping of Politicians

The findings from the mixed model (Model 6) indicate that message recipients did not engage in more negative stereotyping of politicians in response to a news story in which politicians are blamed for economic problems. This finding does not lend support to *H4*. Only in Poland and Austria did people perceive politicians more negatively after the exposure to anti-elite cues. Thus, there is no general effect of news blaming of political actors for societal problems on negative perceptions of politicians as a social group. Blaming other social groups in a news article does not affect stereotyping of politicians. Finally, no interaction effects of group cues on stereotyping of political actors occurred.

Stereotyping of Immigrants

In line with *H6*, exposure to news stories blaming immigrants for economic problems enhances negative stereotypical perceptions of immigrants as a social group. However, this immigrant stereotyping effect is significant only in France and marginally significant in Austria. This stereotyping effect parallels the blaming effect that was also obtained in France. As revealed by individual country analyses, no such effects are observed for the other countries. Other cues in the news story did not affect stereotypes of immigrants in the public. A significant interaction effect in France indicates that blaming immigrants alone results in more negative stereotyping as compared to blaming politicians alone, politicians and immigrants, or nobody.

Stereotyping of the Wealthy

When wealthy people are blamed for future economic problems, readers then engage in negative stereotyping, i.e., they perceive the wealthy to be more lazy, more dishonest, and less sympathetic (Model 8)—confirming our expectation as laid out in *H7*. This effect is significant in Austria, Germany, Israel, and the Netherlands (Figure 10.5). The impact of left-wing populist blaming on negative stereotypes of the wealthy is most pronounced in Israel. Participants exposed to news blaming the wealthy engage in negative stereotyping that is about half a scale point lower as compared to other participants exposed to blaming of other social groups or no groups at all. However, blaming the rich does not affect stereotypes of wealthy people in other countries. Thus, there is partial support for the hypothesis that exposure to news stories in which wealthy people are blamed for societal problems results in negative stereotypes of wealthy people in the public. Other cues in the news story did not affect stereotypes of wealthy people in the public. No interaction effects occurred.



Figure 10.5 Effects of populist cues blaming the wealthy on stereotype perceptions of the wealthy (country-by-country analysis)

Notes: Information on effects of blaming the wealthy on stereotyping of the wealthy per country based on country-by-country OLS regression analyses with stereotype perceptions as dependent variables, and populist cues and specific interactions of populist cues as independent variables.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this chapter, we tested the effects of news framing using various populist cues in 15 European countries on blame attribution and explicit stereotyping. As a key finding, we observed that anti-rich cues in the news have the largest impact and that people are willing to quickly blame the wealthy for being unsympathetic and out of touch. In particular, it seems that people were more likely to react to anti-wealthy cues than to anti-immigrant or anti-politician cues. This can be explained by the specific nature of the news articles used in the present experiment: there was a clear focus on an economic issue in the news. This makes the economic elite, as the main responsible actors, salient, and, therefore, the very same populist messages were more powerful when it comes to economic elites compared to

political elites or immigrants. Respondents were also more likely to react to anti-immigrant cues than to anti-politician cues. This suggests that our experimental blame attributions were more likely to increase perceptions about responsibility when using cues of left-wing anti-elite, or right-wing anti-immigrant, populism. At the same time, anti-elite cues had limited effect, most probably due to a *ceiling effect*, since blame attributions to politicians were already very high across countries.

As far as ‘the people’ are concerned, results show that people-centrality cues do not cause significant effects on blame attribution, and very limited effects (in two countries, Germany and Poland) on stereotypes. Being at the core of the populist discourse of not only populist, but also of mainstream parties, it may be the case that citizens are actually so used to such ‘empty’ appeals to the people that they are hardly ever affected in any way by these kinds of arguments.

Anti-elite cues in media messages, i.e., messages focusing on the political elite, have equally limited effects on blame attribution (significant only in Austria and Spain) and stereotypes (significant only in Poland and Austria). Politicians have long been a source of annoyance for many citizens, and it would appear that many of the citizens in our experiment have negative perceptions of politicians already. This suggests a *ceiling effect*: when cognitive responses are already negative, an additional increase in negative responses is unlikely. Descriptives of blame variables support this argument, as the means of the variable ascribing blame to politicians ($M = 5.35$, $SD = 1.58$) is much higher than for all three other groups (immigrants, the wealthy, politicians) in all 15 countries (see Figure 10.2). Poland, however, is the second to last country (before Sweden) with the lowest mean of blame attribution to politicians ($M = 4.77$, $SD = 1.95$), which could explain the significant effect of enhancing stereotypes in this country. Austria, in turn, is the country in which the Austrian Freedom Party’s speech is impregnated with anti-establishment and anti-immigrant messages (Schmuck, Matthes, & Boomgaarden, 2017, p. 85).

When it comes to immigrants, there were effects on blame attributions in some countries (e.g., France and Ireland) but not in others. Additionally, in Spain and the UK, we found an interaction effect: blaming both immigrants and the political elite yielded significant results. These findings suggest that blaming immigrants, a key strategy of almost all right-wing populist actors, does not automatically lead to more negative cognitive responses with respect to immigrants in any context across Europe. Even though this chapter does not take into account contextual variables, which could be helpful in trying to explain cross-country differences, one may speculate that national debates about immigration could play an important role in explaining those differences. France is known to have fostered animated debates with regards to immigrants long before the refugee crisis in the EU. In Ireland, a recent report jointly elaborated by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission and the Economic and

Social Research Institute, using the European Social Survey 2014, reveals that negative attitudes towards immigrants were registered among the Irish population, especially *in relation to negative economic consequences* (McGinnity, Grotti, Russell, & Fahey, 2018), and therefore one possible explanation could be related to the topic of the news items used as stimuli. At the same time, the populism literature about Ireland often evokes the 2004 referendum on the *withdrawal of Irish citizenship rights for 'non-national' children* as a political response to immigration (Suiter, 2017, p. 131). Moreover, Ireland is among the top four European countries with the highest proportion of foreign-born residents. The UK and Spain also have a relatively high percentage of foreign-born people in their populations, and populist parties have been successful in these countries in recent years, which could explain the interaction effect.

For negative stereotyping, we were only able to observe significant effects in two out of 15 countries (i.e., France and Austria). One could argue that stereotypes are more stable cognitive structures and less prone to short-term effects of media framing. The effect in France mirrors the effect we found with regards to blame attribution, which is in line with the long-lasting xenophobic discourse of the Front National since the mid-1960s (Hubé & Truan, 2018, p. 181). As already mentioned, in Austria, 'the Austrian Freedom Party' communication is characterized by 'an anti-immigrant and anti-establishment rhetoric' (Schmuck et al., 2017, p. 85). The success of anti-immigrant cues might be related to the credibility of the blame attribution: immigrants might be a threat to the cultural heritage or social security but, at least in some countries, not so much to the economic situation of the country. Another way to look at the findings is that immigrants and refugees were already a hot-button topic in most of the countries. Thus, one additional article blaming immigrants for social problems will not be so consequential anymore. In addition, while the article is explicit about *blaming* of social groups, it does not explicitly refer to any negative traits of the groups that were blamed.

As mentioned above, blaming the wealthy in media messages seems to be the most successful recipe for obtaining effects on both blame attribution and stereotype enhancement. People in three countries (Austria, Germany, and the Netherlands) are sensitive to left-wing out-group cues, yielding significant results for both blame attribution and stereotypes. Irish, French, and Italian citizens are significantly influenced by left-wing cues to attribute more responsibility to the wealthy for the economic decline described in the news story, whereas Israelis reacted with more negative stereotypes about this specific out-group when faced with anti-rich blame. Interestingly, Greece, the country in which the left-wing populist Syriza party has been very successful in recent years, does not seem to be especially prone to left-wing populist arguments spread in the media. At the same time, the spectrum of countries in which we found significant effects is rather heterogeneous in terms of purchasing power

and/or general standard of living. Most probably, the topic of the news story used as a stimulus is one of the causes for why left-wing cues were much more effective than right-wing, people centrality, or anti-elitist cues.

When trying to make sense of the country-level data, one interesting question raised is related to patterns of behavior across countries. In Aalberg and de Vreese (2017), a general divide into four geographic regions across Europe has been proposed, accounting for some similarities among various countries (p. 8). Thus, of the 15 countries selected for this study, Western Europe (Austria, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the UK) and Southern Europe (France, Greece, Israel, Italy, and Spain) were over-represented when compared to Northern Europe (Norway and Sweden) or Eastern Europe (Poland and Romania). More often than not, the populist traits specific to these regions are not sufficient to suggest expected patterns. For example, people living in southern parts of Europe where left-wing populism has been more successful in recent years were not more prone to be affected by left-wing cues. Neither were anti-establishment arguments more effective in Western Europe, which is characterized by ‘populists’ parties influence on long-established, mainstream parties’ (Aalberg & de Vreese, 2017, p. 8). An interesting case can be found in the two Eastern European countries represented in the study, Poland and Romania, with Poland being the country in which we found the most significant effects and Romania (along with Sweden) in which no expected significant effect occurred at all. Both Poland and Romania have been characterized by a volatile populist political spectrum, meaning that populist parties have come and gone. Some have been very short-lived but successful, and others have died when their leaders, for one reason or another, faded away from the political arena. However, the very recent success of populist parties in Poland could provide an explanation for the appeal of populist cues for Polish respondents, whereas in recent years in Romania, the political arena has not seen any successful populist actor. This is also suggested by Hameleers et al. (2018b) on the basis of the data used in this chapter. They found that the electoral success of populist parties within a country seems to provide opportunity structures that foster effects of populist messages on political engagement.

What is also interesting is that simple blaming in news stories does not unambiguously trigger explicit stereotypes of social groups in the public. Of course, this should be interpreted in light of the stimuli we employed which did not directly convey strongly negative stereotypes. Yet it is also possible that populist messages which perpetuate negative stereotypes by cumulatively priming associations of out-groups with specific negative attributes may not have the strong impact that researchers fear. In some countries, participants were immune to the populist claims that were expressed, e.g., in Switzerland, Norway, Romania, Greece, and Sweden. Citizens’ responsibility ratings and stereotypes did not vary as a function of populist blame shifting. In Sweden, right-wing populist communication cues even resulted in *less* blaming of immigrants (*backfire effect*).

There are, of course, a number of important limitations that should be kept in mind when interpreting our findings. First of all, conducting an experimental study in 15 countries comes with tremendous challenges. Although we kept all stimuli, materials, measures, and procedures equal in all countries, it is almost impossible to rule out all potential country differences in the perception or employment of stimuli, measures, or procedures. Related to that, we observed significant differences between the countries in terms of the size and direction of the effects of populist communication. Yet, we were unable to explain those differences with the models we used. Future analyses should therefore strive to develop theoretical ideas in order to test cross-level interactions that explain why populist communication succeeds in one context but not in another. Indeed, as some recent findings show, theoretically derived macro-level variables can help to explain why cognitive effects occur in some national contexts but not in others (Hameleers et al., 2018b). In addition, the present study assumed universal effects across countries and individuals. However, we know from previous research that people differ with respect to their susceptibility to populist communication (Bos et al., 2013; Hameleers & Schmuck, 2017; Müller et al., 2017; Schmuck & Matthes, 2015). Therefore, studying individual differences is definitely an important avenue for future research.

Furthermore, the next chapter (by Andreadis et al.) will also look at the consequences of blame attributions on attitudes and voting intentions, following the path of a recent study that used contextual data to explain political engagement effects of populist communication (Hameleers et al., 2018b). Finally, cognitive responses, as measured in our study, may be corrected or negated by some respondents due to socially desirable responding. Especially when it comes to immigrants as victims of negative stereotyping, implicit attitude measures can provide additional insights that are unobtainable with explicit measures used in questionnaires. We therefore urge scholars to replicate the idea of multi-country experimental studies on the effects of populist communication using implicit, in addition to explicit, measures.

From a communication perspective, the results of this study suggest that empty populism cues or anti-establishment arguments used as rhetoric strategies might not sway citizens' attitudes to conform to populist propaganda. At the same time, anti-immigrant and anti-wealth arguments might be pervasive in some cultures, depending on prior cognitive links relating either immigration or a social inequality gap to negative economic consequences.

Notes

1. The removal of these respondents results in more precise estimates, yet yields to similar findings and conclusions.
2. The wording of the question measuring blame attribution was: 'In society, there is disagreement on who or what is responsible for causing a decline of

purchasing power. Could you indicate to what extent you believe the following actors are responsible for causing this development where '1' indicates they are not at all responsible, and '7' indicates they are fully responsible?

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11 Attitudinal and Behavioral Responses to Populist Communication

The Impact of Populist Message Elements on Populist Attitudes and Voting Intentions

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Introduction

In Chapter 8, Hameleers et al. argued that there is evidence that populist communication mechanisms, such as blame attributions, affect citizens' attitudinal responses (e.g., Hameleers, Bos, & de Vreese, 2017) and may guide citizens' behavior and vote intentions (Bellucci, 2014; Hameleers et al., 2018; Marsh & Tilley, 2010). Hameleers et al. (Chapter 8, this volume) have also clarified that these effects are stronger after repeated exposure. Today's media environment may repeatedly expose citizens to populist messages on a daily basis, resulting in cumulative priming effects. However, investigating how a single populist message may affect citizens' attitudes and behaviors can also help us understand the dynamics of how populist communication influences voters and, consequently, societies.

This chapter intends to provide empirical evidence for the specific effects of exposure to a populist message on citizens' political attitudes and vote intentions, and it aims to investigate whether there are country-level differences in these effects. In order to achieve these objectives, the chapter presents the results of a comparative experiment conducted in 15 European countries in which different forms of left-wing and right-wing populist messages are manipulated. In this way, the chapter clarifies how each of the elements in a populist message (i.e., people-centrism, anti-political elitism, and left/right out-group exclusionism) influences citizens' attitudes and propensity to vote for a populist party. This chapter also provides an important insight into the effects of populist communication in different European regions (i.e., Northern, Southern, Central, and Eastern Europe).

Against this backdrop, we have used multilevel models to study the impact of different populist communication cues on populist attitudes

and voting intentions in a comparative perspective. The chapter is organized as follows: First, a review of the literature on populist attitudes and populist voting is provided to explain their meaning and how they may be influenced by populist communication. Then, a description of the method and measures used for conducting the analysis is provided. Finally, the results of the analysis are presented and discussed in the closing section.

Theoretical Background

According to the ideational approach (Stanley, 2008), populism is a set of ideas about how politics should function (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). Defining populism as an ideology has important implications since it allows the study of populism, not only with reference to populist actors (politicians and media) but also among citizens, and it suggests exploring the link between populist parties and their supporters in terms of the sharing of common ideas about politics.

The study of populism on the supply and the demand-side requires different methodological approaches. To reveal politicians' and the media's populism, we can analyze their communication documents (Kriesi, 2014). In order to assess populism among citizens, we have to consider their populist attitudes and voting behaviors. Populist attitudes are very important because they are connected to populist voting. In fact, a series of studies have shown that populist attitudes can play an autonomous role in electoral behavior and are positively associated with voting for populist parties and negatively associated with voting for mainstream parties (e.g., Akkerman, Mudde, & Zaslove, 2014; Andreadis, Hawkins, Llamazares, & Singer (2018); Hawkins, Rovira Kaltwasser, & Andreadis, 2018).

The following sections review the existing literature on populist attitudes and populist voting and how these outcomes may be shaped by the different elements of populist communication (i.e., positive valorization of the people as a homogeneous group, criticism/blaming of the political elite, and criticism/blaming of horizontal out-groups such as immigrants and the super-rich). Based on this review, hypotheses are formulated and tested empirically.

Populist Attitudes

Extant literature offers several suggestions on how to conceptualize and operationalize populist attitudes (e.g., Akkerman et al., 2014; Andreadis & Stavrakakis, 2017; K. Hawkins, Riding, & Mudde, 2012; Schulz et al., 2017; Stavrakakis, Andreadis, & Katsambekis, 2017). These studies have developed different sets of indicators for measuring the presence of populist attitudes among voters. However, most of them are similar since they all refer back to Mudde's (2004, p. 453) definition of populism as 'an

ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite”, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people’. The operationalization proposed by Hameleers et al. (2017) also considers the exclusionism dimension of populism highlighted by the definition put forward by Jagers and Walgrave (2007, p. 323): ‘When political actors talk about the people and combine this with an explicit anti-establishment position and an exclusion of certain population categories, one can talk of thick populism’. A similar approach is used by Reinemann, Aalberg, Esser, Strömbäck, and de Vreese (2017, pp. 23–24): “the people” should be regarded as the key component of populist messages, with anti-elitism and anti-out-group stances serving as optional additional elements. These elements can be combined in various ways, resulting in different types of populism’. In this way, Hameleers et al.’s (2017) operationalization provides a complete measure of the attitudes connected to the support of both left-wing and right-wing populist ideas. In fact, combining Mudde’s (2004) and Jagers and Walgrave’s (2007) definitions, populism consists of two core components: the failed representation of the ordinary people and the moral antagonism between the good people and the evil elites (e.g., political actors, intellectuals, economic organizations, etc.) and/or the dangerous others (e.g., immigrants, ethnic minorities, welfare scroungers, the super-rich, etc.) (Hameleers et al., 2017). Accordingly, populist attitudes consist of the perception of being part of a homogeneous and valuable in-group, believing that citizens should have more power in politics, criticism of the elites, and exclusionism of immigrants and other minorities (Reinemann et al., 2017).

Many studies have investigated the diffusion and spread of populist attitudes in societies and have found that the sharing of populist attitudes may be connected to specific demographic characteristics—such as being male (e.g., Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016), having a low education level (e.g., Andreadis, Stavrakakis, & Demertzis, 2018), and to being in public sector employment (e.g., Tsatsanis, Andreadis, & Teperoglou, 2018)—and to certain psychological factors, such as the feeling of relative deprivation (Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016). In addition, a series of recent studies have focused on the effects of information exposure. They have found that both the repeated exposure and the one-time consumption of messages containing populist cues may affect people’s attitudes (e.g., Hameleers et al., 2017; Müller et al., 2017), as well as their emotions (e.g., Wirz et al., 2018) and behaviors (Hameleers et al., 2018). In order to explain the informational effects on populist attitudes, two psychological mechanisms should be considered: cognitive priming of social identity and blame attribution (see Chapter 8 by Hameleers et al. in this volume).

According to cognitive priming, the way media present an event or group may activate the audience’s interest in it, influence its perception,

and make it cognitively more accessible, thereby strengthening its relative weight in decision-making. This is true also for social identity: A political message may make specific facets of one's social identity more accessible and thereby strengthen some of its specific aspects while neglecting others (Reinemann et al., 2017). For example, the citizens' sense of belonging to the national in-group of 'the people' may be strengthened by a message focusing on the national facet of social identity and by associating it to positive characteristics. Moreover, this effect may even be stronger if the national in-group is also defined in opposition to other groups, such as the political elite (Hameleers et al., Chapter 8 and Corbu et al., Chapter 10 in this volume). This suggests that political messages that focus on the relevance of a problem for the national people and insist on their positive valorization (*people-centrism cue*) may activate a positive evaluation of the group and of its homogeneity. It hypothesizes that the exposure to a *people-centrism cue* enhances respondents' attitudes towards popular sovereignty or/and the homogeneity of the people (*H1a*). Moreover, we can also hypothesize that being exposed to a message that combines a *people-centrism cue* with an *anti-elitism cue* has an even stronger positive effect on respondents' attitudes towards the popular sovereignty or/and the homogeneity of the people (*H1b*).

Blame attribution influences people's attitudes by indicating which actors are responsible for a negative situation. This effect has proven particularly strong with reference to government evaluation and voting behavior: If a national government is blamed for the voters' negative economic situation, it usually receives negative evaluations (Hobolt & Tilley, 2014) and lower electoral support (Marsh & Tilley, 2010). We can assume that this mechanism is also at play in the effects of populist rhetoric that is centered on the depiction of the people as threatened by the bad decisions of the political elites. This notion is also in line with Hameleers et al.'s (2017) results. They found that political news items blaming the national or EU elites increase the perception that the ordinary people's will is not represented by politicians (Hameleers et al., 2017, p. 21). This suggests that being exposed to a message in which the political elite is blamed enhances both anti-establishment and popular sovereignty populist attitudes (*H2*).

However, populist rhetoric often does not only limit the attribution of blame to political elites. Social out-groups (such as immigrants or the super-wealthy) are accused, too, of threatening the well-being of the people with their behavior or being favored by the political elites. In this regard, Hameleers and Schmuck (2017) revealed that online messages blaming the elites or immigrants bolster citizens' exclusionist and anti-establishment populist attitudes. We therefore hypothesize that exposure to a message in which the super-wealthy are blamed enhances respondents' anti-wealthy attitudes (*H3a*), and being exposed to a message in which immigrants are blamed enhances respondents' anti-immigrant

attitudes (*H4a*). Finally, we can also hypothesize that being exposed to a message that combines the blaming of the super-wealthy or immigrants with the blaming of the political elite increases respondents' anti-wealthy or anti-immigrant attitudes as well as their anti-elite attitudes (*H3b*; *H4b*).

Populist Vote Intentions

In recent years, researchers have begun to systematically build an explanatory framework for the electoral performance of populist parties, in spite of the ambiguous nature of the concept of populism as well as the chimeric nature of populist party politics (Barr, 2009). The most important attempts in that regard are in line with the most influential voting behavior models (sociological, psychological, as well as rational choice approach) that do not offer one-factor and, thus, simple explanations of individual political preference, but point to the complex and mediated nature of voting intentions (see, e.g., Antunes, 2010; Lapatinas, 2014).

In this sense both country-level and individual-level factors must be considered. For example, Muis and Immerzeel (2017) noted that the socio-demographic characteristics of (right-wing) populist party followers might differ across contexts, but also highlighted that the motivations for voting for a populist party usually stem from a perceived loss of culture and economic deprivation and largely depend on the salience of particular issues (such as immigration, law and order, and anti-establishment stance) for individuals (Mudde, 2015, p. 299; Rooduijn, 2017).

As far as the individual level is concerned, populist voting intentions may be explained by different psychological and informational mechanisms. First, as highlighted also by Hamelaers et al. in this volume (Chapter 8), the mechanism of blame attribution exploited by populist parties was proven to be effective in influencing the preference for political parties in government in, for instance, the United Kingdom and Ireland (Marsh & Tilley, 2010). According to those results, voters attribute credit and blame to governments for policy success and failure, which in turn affects their party support. The evaluation of the outcome depends on the pre-existing feeling towards a given party. Favored parties are not blamed for policy failures and less favored parties are not credited with policy successes (Marsh & Tilley, 2010). In that regard, one can expect that people who are exposed to populist blame frames are more likely to turn to populist political parties that oppose political elites (Vasilopoulou, Halikiopoulou, & Exadaktylos, 2014).

Second, research has also investigated potential media effects on populist voting. For example, there is evidence that media visibility of populist parties of the right, and news coverage on issues that are focal points for them, enhance (especially when they are combined) the electoral attractiveness of these parties (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2007; Bos, Lefevre, Thijssen, & Sheets, 2017; Vliegenthart, Boomgaarden, & Van

Spanje, 2012). More recently, Hameleers et al. (2017) demonstrated in an experiment in the Dutch context that participants who were exposed to populist messages that blamed the establishment were significantly more likely to vote for the right-wing populist party, PVV, than people exposed to a message that did not use the blame frame. Their findings also indicate that when political elites are blamed for a salient national problem, people are more likely to vote for a populist party and less likely to vote for the largest party in government. This means that populist vote intentions are indirectly affected via blame perceptions.

In addition, Sheets, Bos, and Boomgaarden (2016) tested the effect of being exposed to a media message containing anti-immigrant and anti-establishment stances. Despite not finding a direct effect on the probability to vote for a populist party, they found evidence that populist messages against elites and out-groups have an impact on the antecedents of populist voting, such as political cynicism and anti-immigrant attitudes (Sheets et al., 2016). Finally, Hameleers et al. (2018) found that when people-centrism and anti-elitism are combined in a media message, they may activate political action, such as the sharing of a political article on social media.

Given the scarce existing literature on the effects of populist communication on vote intentions, we can state the following hypothesis: Citizens who are exposed to people-centrism/anti-political elite/anti-outgroup cues will have a stronger intention to vote for populist parties than citizens not exposed to those cues (*H5*). In addition, right-wing anti-outgroup cues (regarding immigrants) should favor right-wing populist parties (*H6a*), and left-wing anti-outgroup cues (regarding the wealthy) should favor left-wing populist parties (*H6b*).

Method

Experimental Design

The main intention of our analysis is to measure the impact of different populist messages on attitudes and the voting behavior of European citizens by using the data collected in a comparative survey experiment in 15 countries. The design was inspired by the Jagers and Walgrave (2007) typology (Hameleers et al., 2018; Reinemann et al., 2017). The main idea of the experiment was to study how a message with elements of people-centrism, anti-elitism, and anti-outgroup cues (either right-wing or left-wing) would affect attitudes and the voting intentions of respondents. In the experiment, respondents were asked to read one of the versions of a short news item about their purchasing power randomly assigned to them. After reading the manipulated news story, respondents were asked to answer a series of questions regarding their populist attitudes and voting behavior (see Chapter 9 by Hameleers, Andreadis, and Reinemann in this volume for a detailed description of the experimental design).

Sample

All data was collected in the first months of 2017 by both international and national research organizations, which were thoroughly instructed to apply similar procedures with regards to recruiting, sampling, stimulus presentation, survey layout, and data collection. The final dataset represents a sample of European citizens with diverse characteristics (see Appendix B for an overview of the respondents' background characteristics by country). After cleaning the data (see Chapter 9 by Hameleers, Andreadis, and Reinemann in this volume for additional details), 2,050 low-quality responses were removed, resulting in a total of 14,499 eligible respondents.¹

Procedure

The experiments were conducted online. All participants gave their informed consent and filled in the pre-test questionnaire (demographics, control variables). Afterwards, they were randomly assigned to one of eight conditions. In each of these conditions, participants were instructed to read a news article for at least 20 seconds (for a report on randomization and manipulation checks, see Chapter 9 by Hameleers, Andreadis, and Reinemann in this volume). The post-test section of the survey contained the dependent variables and manipulation checks, as well as a debriefing and a message of thanks.

Stimuli

The mother versions (templates) of the stimuli were produced in English. It was translated by native speakers in all countries, after thorough discussion about potential inconsistencies and cultural specificities. The control stimulus consisted of a piece of news allegedly published on a fictional online newspaper, which closely mimicked the euronews.com template—a common, familiar template in all European countries. The story referred to a future decline of the purchasing power in the country, reported by the fictitious foundation FutureNow, with a picture of an empty wallet accompanying the text. In the six treatment conditions, the typology of populist communication, as outlined in the theoretical framework, was manipulated (see also Chapter 9 by Hameleers, Andreadis, and Reinemann in this volume). Two additional conditions served as controls (see Appendix A for all stimuli).

Measures

Populist Attitudes Indices

To measure populist attitudes, respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they agree with a series of statements presented in a randomized order (see Table 11.1) on a scale of 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely

Table 11.1 Populist attitudes by dimensions (means, standard deviations)

<i>Dimension/items</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Popular sovereignty</i>			
'The people should have the final say on the most important political issues by voting on them directly in referendums'.	14453	5.28	1.79
'The people should be asked whenever important decisions are taken'.	14456	5.40	1.72
'The politicians in Parliament need to follow the will of the people'.	14453	5.79	1.39
<i>People homogeneity</i>			
'Although the [country members, e.g., British] are very different from each other, when it comes down to it, they all think the same'.	14448	4.21	1.77
'Ordinary people all pull together'.	14436	4.33	1.74
'Ordinary people share the same values and interests'.	14444	4.35	1.73
'Ordinary people are of good and honest character'.	14438	4.53	1.64
<i>Political elite</i>			
'Politicians in government are corrupt'.	14481	4.84	1.83
'Politicians make decisions that harm the interests of the ordinary people'.	14478	5.2	1.67
'Politicians are not really interested in what people like me think'.	14472	5.35	1.69
'MPs in Parliament very quickly lose touch with ordinary people'.	14479	5.68	1.47
<i>Left-wing out-group (the wealthy)</i>			
'International financial institutions have colonized our country'.	14445	4.76	1.75
'A bunch of rich families are really running this country'.	14475	4.86	1.82
'Big corporations accumulate wealth by exploiting the people'.	14475	5.23	1.67
<i>Right-wing out-group (immigrants)</i>			
'Immigrants are responsible for a lot of our nation's problems'.	14455	3.54	2.03
'People who are not originally from our country should have no rights on our social benefits'.	14448	3.72	2.11
'Immigrants are threatening the purity of our culture'.	14455	3.83	2.18
'Immigrants cost our country a lot of money that should rather be invested in our own people'.	14444	4.35	2.13

Notes: Means are based on scales of 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree).

agree). The first three items reflect the people-centrism dimension of populism, and, more specifically, attitudes related to popular sovereignty. The following four items reflect perceptions of people's homogeneity. A third set of items reflect anti-political elite attitudes using statements referring to the perceived corruptness of politicians and their responsiveness to people's demands. Another group of items reflect left-wing anti-outgroup attitudes by using statements about 'the rich' and 'big corporations'. And, finally, there are anti-immigrant statements reflecting the right-wing anti-outgroup dimension of populism.

In line with the theoretical dimensional structure that is described above, we have created five indices by calculating the average value of these variables (items): (1) popular sovereignty index; (2) people's homogeneity index; (3) anti-political elite index; (4) left-wing anti-outgroup index; and (5) right-wing anti-outgroup index, and we use these indices as our dependent variables. In Tables 11.2 and 11.3, we present descriptive statistics of the indices in each country along with the MSA H coefficient. Although the coefficients in all countries are larger than the typical rule of thumb used in MSA (0.3), we can observe that there are significant differences between the countries.

As for the mean values of the popular sovereignty index, the lowest value appears in Sweden (4.19) while the highest values appear in Romania (6.09), Poland (5.94), Spain (5.84), France (5.81), and Italy (5.72). Regarding the homogeneity index, we do not observe considerable fluctuations in the mean values of the countries. The only exception is Greece, with a lower mean value (3.58). This means that respondents in Greece were less inclined to view their fellow-citizens as positively valued in-group with similar interests and values. Regarding the anti-political index, the country with the highest mean value is Romania (5.97), and Spain and France follow with mean values of 5.85 and 5.83, respectively. The lowest mean values are observed in Sweden (3.96) and Norway (4.31). This shows that citizens in these Northern European countries have the most positive view of their politicians (see also Chapter 10 by Corbu et al. in this volume).

Table 11.3 presents the descriptive statistics and MSA H coefficients of the left and right anti-outgroup indices. The left anti-outgroup scale is not as strong as the other indices. On a country-level, it is stronger in Greece ($H = 0.661$) and much weaker in Israel ($H = 0.373$). As far as the mean values of the left anti-outgroup index are concerned, the lowest value appears in Sweden (3.87), while the highest value is observed in Romania (5.89). This means that respondents in Romania had the most negative attitudes towards 'the rich' and 'big corporations', whereas attitudes were much more positive in Sweden. The right anti-outgroup scale is the strongest among all scales used in this chapter. The scale is weaker in Romania ($H = 0.491$). Attitudes towards immigrants are most negative in Italy (4.54), France (4.46), and Austria (4.43), while they are much more

Table 11.2 Populist attitudes indices per country (means; standard deviations; MSA H coefficients)

Country	Popular sovereignty			People homogeneity			Political elite					
	N	Mean	SD	H	N	Mean	SD	H	N	Mean	SD	H
Austria	1065	5.62	1.37	0.710	1065	4.34	1.55	0.699	1065	5.13	1.32	0.644
France	1033	5.81	1.25	0.753	1033	4.33	1.56	0.664	1039	5.83	1.13	0.578
Germany	817	5.47	1.35	0.686	817	4.43	1.45	0.673	816	4.99	1.35	0.631
Greece	1101	5.34	1.73	0.766	1093	3.58	1.56	0.605	1102	5.78	1.12	0.531
Ireland	771	5.66	1.33	0.727	771	4.61	1.35	0.648	775	5.36	1.31	0.672
Israel	913	5.40	1.30	0.635	913	4.01	1.46	0.626	918	5.60	1.13	0.558
Italy	852	5.72	1.38	0.758	852	4.54	1.49	0.734	858	5.79	1.15	0.599
Netherlands	742	4.86	1.49	0.712	741	4.33	1.27	0.582	743	4.71	1.21	0.453
Norway	866	5.15	1.34	0.663	866	4.48	1.08	0.444	866	4.31	1.44	0.603
Poland	1096	5.94	1.20	0.772	1097	4.63	1.47	0.657	1098	5.62	1.21	0.619
Romania	1297	6.09	1.19	0.581	1297	4.71	1.51	0.613	1297	5.97	1.28	0.617
Spain	942	5.84	1.25	0.692	942	4.79	1.34	0.631	945	5.85	1.17	0.621
Sweden	1030	4.19	1.68	0.586	1030	4.25	1.15	0.350	1030	3.96	1.62	0.664
Switzerland	1030	5.62	1.24	0.649	1030	4.09	1.39	0.576	1034	4.42	1.39	0.631
United Kingdom	907	5.28	1.44	0.722	907	4.24	1.39	0.667	910	5.27	1.26	0.641
Total	14462	5.49	1.45	0.714	14454	4.35	1.45	0.624	14496	5.27	1.42	0.664

Notes: Means are based on scales of 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree).

Table 11.3 Indices of populist attitudes toward left-wing ('the wealthy') and right-wing out-groups ('immigrants') per country (index means; standard deviations; MSA H coefficients)

Country	Left-wing out-group (the wealthy)				Right-wing out-group (immigrants)			
	N	Mean	SD	H	N	Mean	SD	H
Austria	1065	5.07	1.16	0.498	1065	4.43	1.91	0.789
France	1039	5.65	1.07	0.538	1033	4.46	1.95	0.776
Germany	817	4.95	1.2	0.511	817	4.26	1.82	0.754
Greece	1104	5.66	1.11	0.661	1102	2.83	1.76	0.708
Ireland	775	5.29	1.19	0.555	771	3.52	1.82	0.734
Israel	918	5.42	1.02	0.373	913	3.90	1.69	0.679
Italy	858	5.64	1.02	0.528	852	4.54	1.49	0.745
Netherlands	743	4.49	1.20	0.511	741	3.89	1.76	0.753
Norway	866	4.35	1.28	0.549	866	3.77	1.87	0.755
Poland	1098	5.47	1.1	0.478	1097	4.06	1.75	0.698
Romania	1297	5.89	1.09	0.597	1297	4.14	1.58	0.491
Spain	945	5.65	1.1	0.563	942	3.72	1.81	0.737
Sweden	1030	3.87	1.35	0.593	1030	2.79	1.85	0.757
Switzerland	1034	4.55	1.22	0.49	1030	3.8	1.81	0.741
United Kingdom	910	5.22	1.15	0.564	907	3.99	1.96	0.782
Total	14499	5.17	1.29	0.591	14463	3.86	1.88	0.738

Notes: Means and standard deviations are based on indices using scales of 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree). Higher values indicate more negative attitudes towards the respective out-groups.

positive in Sweden (2.79) and Greece (2.83). This means that immigrants are perceived very differently by our respondents in the various countries and that this perception evidently cannot simply be traced back to their geographical location or the number of immigrants they have accepted in recent years.

Populist Vote Intention Models

For our other dependent variable, also measured after the stimuli, we gave respondents a list of up to nine political parties in each individual country and prompted them to indicate for each of these parties how probable it is that they will ever vote for it. We used an 11-point scale where 0 means 'not at all probable' and 10 means 'very probable'.

In order to classify parties as populist or non-populist, we used data from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) (Polk et al., 2017). In order to discover how each party ranks within its country on the salience of

anti-establishment and anti-elite rhetoric and the salience of reducing political corruption, we used two items measured in CHES 2014. The questions posed to national experts were as follows: ‘Next, we’d like you to consider the salience of the following issues for each party over the course of 2014 i) Salience of anti-establishment and anti-elite rhetoric, and ii) Salience of reducing political corruption’. These items are measured on an 11-point scale where 0 means ‘not important at all’ and 10 means ‘extremely important’. We used the average value of these two items to identify the populist actors on the supply-side in each country.²

Although we consider populism to be a gradual phenomenon, we chose to apply a threshold here in order to classify the parties as populist or not. Using a common threshold for all countries would not work because the salience of these issues differs significantly from country to country. For instance, in Norway, the highest score is 3.83 (Progress Party) and the average score of all Norwegian parties is 2.48, while in Greece, the lowest score is 3.44 (New Democracy) and the average score of all Greek parties is 7.07. Although their scores are very close to each other, the Progress Party can be considered as an anti-establishment populist party in Norway, while New Democracy is one of the anti-populist parties in Greece.

Instead of using a common threshold for all countries, we therefore used the average score of all parties in a country as the threshold for each country. Then we were able to classify as populist the parties that have a score higher than the average national score. Of course, the national average can be considered a low threshold and we may have some false positives because there may be parties with high anti-establishment scores, which are not considered populist by most of the scholars. On the other hand, selecting any other value instead of the average value as our threshold would probably be even more arbitrary.

With this approach, we were able to classify correctly all populist parties known from the literature (Aalberg, Esser, Reinemann, Strömbäck, & de Vreese, 2017). Of course, other criteria could be used to classify parties as populist. For instance, Rooduijn (2017) selects parties which are prototypically populist (categorized as populist by most country experts). However, our study includes 123 political parties in 15 different countries and the manual classification of them would be not only time consuming, but even impossible for some of the smaller or newer parties. In addition, experts may be in disagreement about the classification of many parties, even for some larger and well-known parties; for instance, the German party The Left is classified as populist by Rooduijn (2017), but Fawzi, Obermaier, and Reinemann (2017, p. 115) argue that ‘The Left, can currently be called a mainstream party, at least in eastern Germany’.

The political preferences and the ideological position of the voters of left-wing populist parties is different from the position of the voters of right-wing populist parties (Andreadis & Stavrakakis, 2017). Thus, we

need to further classify our populist parties as left-wing or right-wing. Following a similar procedure, as we did with the populism classification, we have used the GAL/TAN immigration and multiculturalism CHES item for the classification of parties as (socio-culturally) left (libertarian) or right (authoritarian). More specifically, we have classified the populist parties with scores higher than their national GAL/TAN, immigration, and multiculturalism average as (socio-culturally) right-wing populist parties,³ and we have classified the rest of the populist parties as left-wing populist parties. At this point it is worth mentioning that a simple quantitative criterion may not be adequate to correctly classify all kinds of parties. Therefore, we acknowledge that there may be disputed cases in the area of populism/extremism, such as the Golden Dawn party in Greece or the NPD in Germany. On the other hand, (1) it is beyond the scope of this chapter to make a precise classification of all European political parties, and (2) even extremist parties such as Golden Dawn are capable of speaking populism and in fact they often use populist discourse (Hawkins et al., 2018).

Finally, for our voting intention models, we created three dependent variables: (1) voting intentions for populist parties in general (using the average voting intention for all parties classified as populist); (2) voting intentions for right-wing populist parties (using the average voting intention for all parties classified as right-wing populist); and (3) voting intentions for left-wing populist parties (using the average voting intention for all parties classified as left-wing populist). In Table 11.4, we display

Table 11.4 Populist vote intentions per country (average propensity to vote for right-wing, left-wing, or populist parties in general)

<i>Country</i>	<i>Right-wing populist parties*</i>		<i>Left-wing populist parties**</i>		<i>Populist parties combined</i>	
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Austria	2.22	2.19	3.17	2.9	2.6	1.64
France	3.03	2.73	2.78	3.04	2.94	2.08
Germany	1.58	2.53	2.05	2.34	1.82	1.94
Greece	0.89	1.48	1.92	2.5	1.34	1.52
Ireland	3.64	3.56	3.21	2.69	3.35	2.55
Israel	3.45	3.19	4.33	2.81	4.04	2.44
Italy	2.86	3.52	3.23	2.54	3.11	2.19
Netherlands	2.96	2.65	4.11	3.56	3.34	2.26
Norway	3.13	2.39	1.91	2.49	2.52	1.58
Poland	2.76	2.57	–	–	2.76	2.57

(Continued)

Table 11.4 (Continued)

<i>Country</i>	<i>Right-wing populist parties*</i>		<i>Left-wing populist parties**</i>		<i>Populist parties combined</i>	
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Romania	–	–	2.62	2.62	2.62	2.62
Spain	3.44	3.29	2.91	3.21	3.08	2.21
Sweden	2.16	3.61	2.76	3.03	2.56	1.91
Switzerland	3.09	2.57	3.24	2.93	3.14	2.12
United Kingdom	2.66	3.37	2.21	2.57	2.36	2.06

Notes: Table entries are mean values and standard deviations of propensities to vote for the parties in each group. Propensity to vote was measured on 11-point scales ranging from 0 (not at all probable) to 10 (very probable).

* Right-wing populist parties: FPÖ—Austrian Freedom Party, Team Stronach, BZÖ—Alliance for the Future of Austria (Austria); National Front, Movement for France (France); AfD—Alternative for Germany, NPD—National Democratic Party (Germany); Golden Dawn, ANEL, Union of Center (Greece); 3 Sinn Fein (Ireland); Kulanu (Israel); Northern League (Italy); Party for the Freedom, 50 Plus (Netherlands); Senterpartiet—The Centre Party, Fremskrittspartiet—Progress Party (Norway); Prawo i Sprawiedliwość—Law and Justice, Kukiz' 15, Kongres Nowej Prawicy—The New Right Congress (Poland); Ciudadanos—Partido de la Ciudadanía (C's)/Citizens—Party of the Citizenry (Spain); Sverigedemokraterna (SD)—Sweden Democrats or Swedish Democrats (Sweden); Swiss People's Party, Federal Democratic Union (Switzerland); UK Independence Party—UKIP (United Kingdom).

** Left-wing populist parties: Austrian Green Party, NEOS—The New Austria and Liberal Forum (Austria); Europe Ecology—The Greens (France); The Left, Pirate Party (Germany); Syriza, KKE (Greece); Green, AA/PBP (Ireland); Zionist Union, Yesh Atid, Meretz (Israel); Five Stars Movement, Left Ecology & Freedom/Italian Left (Italy); Socialist Party (Netherlands); Sosialistisk Venstreparti—The Socialist Left Party, Miljøpartiet De Grønne—The Green Party (Norway); PMP—People's Movement Party, PNL—National Liberal Party (Romania); Podemos—'We Can' and their confluences, United Left (Spain); Vänsterpartiet (V)—The Left Party, Miljöpartiet (MP)—The Green Party (Sweden); Christian Democratic People's Party (Switzerland); Green Party of England and Wales, Scottish National Party—SNP (United Kingdom).

descriptive statistics for the dependent variables. The parties that have been classified in the populist groups (both left and right) are displayed in notes under the table.

Our dataset has a hierarchical structure with respondents nested within 15 different countries. To test the effects of populist cues on voters' populist attitudes and voting intention (dependent variables) in all country samples simultaneously while controlling for the dependency of the observations on the country level, we have run multilevel models. In order to study each country separately, we also used OLS regressions for each country (see Chapter 9 by Hameleers, Andreadis, and Reinemann in this volume for further details on using multilevel models with a rather small number of Level 2 units).

Results

Populist Attitudes

The subsequent section looks at the impact of the different cues used in populist communication ('people-centrism', 'anti-political elite', 'anti-outgroup') and of interactions between them on populist attitudes.

People-Centrism Cue

According to the coefficients presented in Table 11.5, the people-centrism cue strengthens the populist attitudes of readers related to popular sovereignty and people homogeneity—as was expected—but also anti-political elite and left-wing anti-outgroup attitudes. Presenting an article that portrays the people as victims of the future crisis of purchasing power activates popular sovereignty (0.094) and people homogeneity (0.073) when compared with people who have read a version of the news article that refers to the crisis *without* portraying the people as victims. The small effect size appears as statistically significant due to the large sample size of the combined dataset.

Thus, if we focus on each country separately, there is a statistically significant impact only in Italy and Spain, and only for the popular sovereignty index. Moreover, a statistically significant impact of the people-centrism cue is also observed on anti-political elite and anti-wealthy (left-wing anti-outgroup) attitudes, and the effect size is estimated at 0.095 and 0.077, respectively. Here, priming the in-group indeed makes citizens more populist—although very slightly, confirming our first hypothesis (*H1a*). If we check on interactions with the anti-political elite cue (Table 11.6), we do not notice any significant effect on popular sovereignty or homogeneity attitudes of the reader, as we expected (*H1b*). However, there is a significant impact of this interaction on anti-immigrant attitudes.

Anti-Political Elite Cue

The results show that exposure to news stories that blame politicians for economic problems does *not* activate populist attitudes in the public. We do not observe a significant impact of anti-elite cue in any of the indices of the analysis. The coefficients are positive but relatively small (0.020–0.057) and even in the large, combined sample, they are not significant. As revealed by individual country analyses, news blaming politicians does not translate into significant changes of populist attitudes in any of the countries. Hence, we should reject our second hypothesis (*H2*).

Left-Wing Anti-Outgroup Cue

Exposure to a news article that blames wealthy people for economic problems seems to have a positive impact on almost all the populist attitudes of

Table 11.5 Main effects of populist cues on populist attitudes (multilevel models; unstandardized coefficients; standard errors in parentheses)

	Popular sovereignty index	People homogeneity index	Anti-elite index	Left-wing anti-outgroup index	Right-wing anti-outgroup index
Intercept	5.392 (0.121)**	4.283 (0.081)**	5.167 (0.160)**	5.074 (0.149)**	3.802 (0.131)**
<i>Level 1 fixed effects</i>					
People-centrism cue	.094 (0.032)**	.073 (0.033)*	.095 (0.030)**	.077 (0.027)**	.040 (0.042)
Anti-political elite cue	.020 (0.023)	.029 (0.024)	.028 (0.021)	.027 (0.019)	.057 (0.030)
Left-wing anti-outgroup cue	.070 (0.032)*	.099 (0.033)**	.086 (0.030)**	.098 (0.027)**	.017 (0.042)
Right-wing anti- outgroup cue	.101 (0.032)**	.070 (0.033)*	.056 (0.030)	.052 (0.027)	.081 (0.042)
<i>Random effects</i>					
Country-level variance	.210 (0.077)**	.088 (0.033)**	.377 (0.138)**	.324 (0.119)**	.240 (0.089)**
Individual-level variance	1.894 (0.022)**	2.007 (0.024)**	1.636 (0.019)**	1.326 (0.016)**	3.266 (0.038)**
Intra-country correlation	.100	.042	.187	.196	.068
Log likelihood	-25173.062	-23571.145	-24179.350	-22662.253	-29113.778
N	14462	14454	14496	14499	14463

Notes: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

readers. As expected (*H3a*), presenting an article that blames the wealthy for future economic problems activates anti-wealthy attitudes. However, Table 11.5 demonstrates that although the value of this coefficient is statistically significant, the effect size of this cue is also small (0.098). If we focus on each country separately, there is a statistically significant impact in five of the countries: Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, and the UK. In addition, we notice a statistically significant impact of the left anti-outgroup cue on people-centrism (0.099 and 0.070) and on anti-political elite (0.086) attitudes. Hence, even though the first part of our hypothesis is confirmed (*H3a*), if we check on the interaction with the anti-political elite cue (Table 11.6), we do not observe any significant impact on populist attitudes (*H3b*).

Right-Wing Anti-Outgroup Cue

A news article about an economic problem that is attributed to immigrants seems to activate people-centrism populist attitudes, but not anti-immigrant attitudes as expected (*H4a*). As shown in Table 11.5, being exposed to this populist cue has a positive and significant effect only on respondents' popular sovereignty (0.101) and homogeneity of the people (0.070) attitudes. Nevertheless, if we focus on each country separately, there is a statistically significant impact on anti-immigrant attitudes only in Italy and Greece. Moreover, if we check on potential interactions with the anti-political elite cue (Table 11.6), we do not observe any significant impact on populist attitudes of the readers, rejecting our research hypothesis (*H4b*).

Interactions

Finally, we explore any impact of potential interactions on populist attitudes. As Table 11.5 displays, the only significant impact that we notice, as mentioned above, is the interaction of people-centrism and anti-political elite cues on anti-immigrant attitudes (0.170). We have not observed any other interactions with a statistically significant impact on populist attitude indices.

Populist Vote Intentions

In this section we analyze whether cues in the news affect voting intentions for populist parties in general, and left- and right-wing parties in particular.

People-Centrism Cue

Table 11.7 shows that the people-centrism cue is not associated with any significant impact on voting intentions for populist parties, neither

Table 11.6 Effects of populist cues' interactions on populist attitudes (multilevel models; unstandardized coefficients; standard errors in parentheses)

	<i>Popular sovereignty index</i>	<i>People homogeneity index</i>	<i>Anti-political elite index</i>	<i>Left-wing anti-outgroup index</i>	<i>Right-wing anti-outgroup index</i>
Intercept	5.379 (0.122)***	4.293 (0.083)***	5.158 (0.161)***	5.063 (0.149)***	3.842 (0.133)***
<i>Level 1 fixed effects</i>					
People-centrism cue	.103 (0.046)*	.023 (0.047)	.080 (0.042)	.066 (0.038)	-.045 (0.060)
Anti-political elite cue	.046 (0.045)	.009 (0.046)	.046 (0.042)	.049 (0.038)	-.024 (0.059)
Left-wing anti-outgroup cue	.084 (0.046)	.087 (0.047)	.095 (0.042)*	.112 (0.038)**	-.012 (0.060)
Right-wing anti-outgroup cue	.130 (0.045)**	.091 (0.047)	.097 (0.042)*	.093 (0.038)*	.033 (0.059)
People-centrism x anti-political elite cue	-.018 (0.065)	.100 (0.067)	.029 (0.060)	.023 (0.054)	.170 (0.085)*
Left anti-outgroup x anti-political elite cue	-.027 (0.064)	.023 (0.066)	-.019 (0.060)	-.027 (0.054)	.059 (0.085)
Right anti-outgroup x anti-political elite cues	-.058 (0.064)	-.042 (0.066)	-.083 (0.060)	-.082 (0.054)	.097 (0.084)
<i>Random effects</i>					
Country-level variance	.210 (0.077)***	.088 (0.033)***	.377 (0.138)**	.324 (0.119)**	.240 (0.089)***
Individual-level variance	1.894 (0.022)***	2.006 (0.024)***	1.636 (0.019)***	1.326 (0.016)***	3.265 (0.038)***
Intra-country correlation	.100	.042	.187	.197	.068
Log likelihood	-25172.627	-25568.774	-24177.493	-22660.168	-29111.673
N	14462	14454	14496	14499	14463

Notes: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 11.7 Multilevel model: Effects of populist cues on voting intentions for anti-establishment parties (unstandardized coefficients; standard errors in parentheses)

	<i>Voting intentions for populist parties</i>	<i>Voting intentions for right-wing populist parties</i>	<i>Voting intentions for left-wing populist parties</i>
Intercept	2.704 (0.166)***	2.599 (0.203)***	2.866 (0.197)***
<i>Level 1 fixed effects</i>			
People-centrism cue	0.008 (0.051)	0.031 (0.071)	-0.036 (0.069)
Anti-political elite cue	0.060 (0.036)	0.067 (0.050)	0.057 (0.049)
Right anti-outgroup cue	0.104 (0.050)*	0.171 (0.070)*	0.024 (0.069)
Left anti-outgroup cue	0.043 (0.050)	0.090 (0.071)	-0.012 (0.069)
<i>Random effects</i>			
Country-level variance	0.391 (0.145)*	0.533 (0.205)	0.501 (0.193)
Individual-level variance	4.597 (0.054)***	8.215 (0.102)***	7.915 (0.097)***
Intra-country correlation	0.078	0.061	0.060
Log likelihood	-31308.369	-32230.639	-32488.610
N	14336	13027	13231

Notes: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. In Romania, we were not able to find right-wing anti-establishment parties. In Poland, we were not able to find left-wing anti-establishment parties.

right-wing nor left-wing. However, on a country-level analysis, in Romania the people-centrism cue seems to be associated with votes for populist parties, and, more specifically, when we study left- and right-wing parties separately we find that the people-centrism cue is associated with the left populist vote. On the other hand, in Sweden, voting for the single party that has been classified by our method as a right-wing populist party in this country (Sweden Democrats) is increased among the voters who have been exposed to the people-centrism cue.

Anti-Political Elite Cue

As with the people-centrism cue, an anti-political elite cue does not seem to have any significant impact on populist voting intentions. Blaming the political elites for an economic problem does not have any significant

effect on the voting intentions of readers, neither for right-wing nor for left-wing populist parties.⁴ On the country level, the highest impact of the anti-political elite cue on voting intentions for populist parties is apparent in Switzerland. When we focus separately on left- and right-wing parties, we find that the anti-elite cue is associated with the left-wing populist vote.

Left-Wing Anti-Outgroup Cue

As with the previously mentioned cues, blaming the wealthy does not have any significant impact on populist voting intentions of readers. As for country-level analyses, the presentation of a left out-group cue seems to be associated with more votes for populist parties in Romania, but when we study left- and right-wing parties separately, we observe that the left anti-outgroup cue is associated with the right populist vote, although anti-wealthy rhetoric usually belongs to the left-wing political agenda. The same also happens in Greece; the left anti-outgroup cue has a positive impact on voting for the right-wing anti-establishment parties (Golden Dawn, ANEL, and Union of Center).

Right-Wing Anti-Outgroup Cue

In contrast to the cues analyzed so far, a news article about an economic problem that is attributed to immigrants seems to increase voting intentions for populist parties according to the findings in the combined dataset. More specifically, a right-wing anti-outgroup cue has no impact on voting for left-wing populist parties, but it has a positive impact on voting for right-wing populist parties. According to the individual country analyses, a right-wing anti-outgroup cue has a positive impact on voting for right-wing populist parties in Norway, where the two parties that have been classified by our method as right-wing anti-establishment parties (the Centre Party and the Progress Party) have higher vote intention scores among people who have been exposed to the article blaming immigrants.

Discussion and Conclusion

In most of the countries in this experiment, populist attitudes of citizens are not influenced considerably by the populist communication cues or their interactions. Most notably, an article with an anti-elite cue does not seem to activate populist attitudes of citizens when compared to a news article that refers to the crisis without blaming the political elite. Hence, it is hard to notice strong populist communication effects after one single message. This finding is compatible with the literature and scholars who argue that populist attitudes among citizens are a stable trait, and communication effects are stronger when the exposure is repeated (e.g.,

Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2007; Schemer, 2014) or habitual (e.g., Hamelaers et al. Chapter 8 in this volume). In addition, given that the economic crisis is a salient issue, people may have already developed a solid prior opinion on who should be blamed for a future economic crisis, too.

On the other hand, people-centrism and left-wing anti-outgroup cues exhibit the strongest priming impact on almost all of the populist attitudes, and especially on people-centrism (popular sovereignty and homogeneity) and anti-wealthy attitudes, confirming at least two of our hypotheses (*H1a* and *H3a*). However, it is worth mentioning that although the impact of these cues is statistically significant, the effect size is relatively small. Another interesting finding is related to the right-wing anti-outgroup cue. Although it does not significantly affect the anti-immigrant attitudes, as we had expected, we have observed a significant impact on people-centrism attitudes. As for the interactions of populist communication cues, the only significant impact we have observed is the impact of the interaction between people-centrism and anti-political elite on anti-immigrant attitudes.

On a country-level, we do not observe specific geographic patterns among countries. People-centrism cues have an impact on popular sovereignty attitudes in two Southern European countries, Italy and Spain, but they do not have a significant effect on homogeneity attitudes in any country of the study. The anti-political elite cue has no impact in any of the countries, at least as far as attitudes towards the political elite are concerned. On the contrary, the left-wing anti-outgroup cue influences populist attitudes in a large number of countries (Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, and the UK). Moreover, the right-wing anti-outgroup cue activates significantly anti-immigrant attitudes in Italy and Greece, two countries affected considerably by the refugee crisis. In addition, this cue has affected anti-wealthy attitudes in Poland and Romania and people-centrism attitudes in Ireland, Poland, and Greece. Hence, the right-wing anti-outgroup cue is also effective in countries not affected considerably by the refugee crisis and where immigration is lower than emigration. This strengthens the notion of the resentments and myths of populist politics, i.e., sometimes it is possible for a populist party to appear as a solution to serious problems, even when the problem is not real, as long as the voters perceive the problem to be real.

Finally, there are countries in which the populist attitudes of citizens are not affected by any of the populist message elements at all (i.e., Norway, Sweden, France, Austria, and Israel). Some of these countries are more familiar with populist actors than others; hence a single news article with a populist context is not able to radically change the profile of the electorate.

As far as voting intentions for populist parties are concerned, the anti-immigrant cue has the strongest impact on voting for right-wing populist parties. As revealed by the individual country analyses, at least one of the

cues has an effect on populist voting in five of the 15 countries (Greece, Norway, Romania, Sweden, and Switzerland). More specifically, the individual country analyses have shown that an anti-immigrant cue has a significant effect on voters in Norway for right-wing populist parties. In Switzerland, the anti-elite cue had the strongest impact on voting intentions for left-wing populist parties. In Romania, being exposed to the people-centrism cue is associated with a higher likelihood of a left-wing populist vote, and reading the anti-wealthy cue is associated with right-wing populist voting intentions. The anti-wealthy cue also considerably affected voting intentions for the Greek right-wing populist parties, showing that anti-wealthy rhetoric not only appeals to the voters of left-wing populist parties. Finally, voting for the Sweden Democrats, which is classified as a right-wing populist party in our method, is influenced by the people-centrism cue.

The above analysis and the underpinning empirical study (social experiment) is an attempt to analyze populism and its core elements, such as anti-establishment sentiment, outside of the political realm led by the conviction that populist messages can become even more persuasive and influential beyond the party politics sphere while present in public debate in the media (Rooduijn, 2014). We followed the line of studies demonstrating that public debates have become more populist over the years and that the degree of populism interplays with the success of populist parties. What has been tested here is an alleged influence of the online-based populist message, on the European public and voters' attitudes, and voting intentions.

Contrary to the voting behavior or intentions that can be driven by short-term factors or singular, non-recurring events, people's attitudes are harder to change, which seems to be the result of a long-term process of (political) socialization (see also Chapter 8 by Hameleers et al. in this volume). Hence, any kind of influence proved to be the result of a single exposition to the online message can be seen as an important hint in understanding the spread of populism and its in-depth social effects. Interestingly, a left-wing anti-outgroup cue had stronger effects on the attitudinal responses of voters, especially in Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, and the UK. On the other hand, the cue without any significant influence on voters' populist attitudes was the anti-elite cue. Finally, an interesting contribution to this study is the evidence that shows blaming immigrants can also be effective in countries not affected considerably by the refugee crisis and where immigration is lower than emigration (e.g., Romania and Poland).

The introductory finding aligns with the existing texts and recommendations to look carefully at the country context as well as the salience of particular issues for populist supporters (Mudde, 2015). When it comes to the explanatory potential of the relationship between exposure to populist

messages and political preferences, the anti-immigrant cues had a positive impact on voting for right-wing populist parties, according to the findings in the combined dataset. Ascribing guilt for a future economic downfall to immigrants triggered the populist parties' support in Nordic countries (Sweden and Norway), whereas in countries of the south (Greece and Romania), which much more touched by the economic downfall, the notion of the guilty wealthy was echoed in the political choices of the respondents.

An important motivator for continuing and developing the study is the lack of a significant relationship between mediated populism and individual political choices in eight out of 15 countries. This does not necessarily indicate a lack of influence of populist messages, as mentioned earlier, but it indicates that things are much more complicated. Therefore, a necessary next step in the analysis of the effects of attitudes and behavior is to test the moderating role of individual predispositions which have been shown to be crucial in media effects in general and populist effects in particular (e.g., Hameleers et al., 2017; Hameleers & Schmuck, 2017). Moreover, it will be necessary to include country characteristics in a more systematic fashion (Hameleers et al., 2018). Finally, considering the complex nature of populism and of voting behaviors, a further step would be to test the possible results on non-partisan populist attitudes on the individual and country level.

Notes

1. The removal of these respondents results in more precise estimates, yet yields to similar findings and conclusions.
2. We should note that the CHES 2014 (the most recent CHES data covering all countries under study) items measure the salience of anti-establishment and anti-corruption positions of parties, but they are not able to measure the other significant dimensions of populism used here: popular sovereignty, i.e., that power should be transferred to the people, as well as left-wing anti-outgroup sentiment towards 'the rich'. CHES also covers socio-cultural preferences (e.g., attitudes towards immigrants; see below).
3. A similar classification using the GAL/TAN and populism dimensions of the CHES 2014 dataset have been used by Norris and Inglehart (2019), but instead of using the term 'right-wing populist parties', they prefer the term 'authoritarian parties'.
4. In addition, none of the interactions between the anti-elite and the rest of the cues (tables not shown here to save space) are significant.

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Part IV

Conclusion



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12 Adapting to the Different Shades of Populism

Key Findings and Implications for Media, Citizens, and Politics

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Introduction

This book started from several assumptions, the key one being that although the rise of populism can be regarded as an international trend, it may take different forms when investigated in an internationally comparative manner. This book set out to look systematically for both similarities and differences in populist political communication processes in a variety of European nations. The previous chapters presented findings from several large-scale and comparative studies of populist communication. They examined how politicians and journalists perceive populism and the role of the media and communication (Part I); populist elements in media coverage and the factors explaining their prevalence (Part II); and cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral effects of populist communication, using cross-national survey embedded experiments (Part III).

The purpose of this concluding chapter is two-fold. On the one hand, we want to tease out and summarize the key findings of the different chapters. What do these studies tell us, collectively? On the other hand, we want to extrapolate from these findings and the current literature to offer concrete stakeholder advice to politicians, journalists, and citizens who are all confronted with the challenge of populist politics and populist messages. For discussions of the limitations of this research and future research directions, we refer the reader back to the conclusions of the individual chapters where these are discussed in detail.

Key Findings

Perceptions of Populism and the Media: Contexts and Experiences Matter

The first part of this volume took a close look at how journalists and politicians across Europe perceive populism and the role played by the media in its successes and failures. While *journalists* did not agree on a single

definition of populism, they overwhelmingly saw the phenomenon as a 'negative force' having detrimental consequences for European democracies and societies, and this was especially true for countries in which populists are in government (see the chapter by Stanyer et al.). Despite the absence of a shared definition, and limited critical reflection of the term, the journalists from 13 countries could easily identify populist politicians, although some only mentioned international examples and refrained from naming domestic ones. There were no strong regional patterns of perceptions of populism or systematic differences between journalists from different types of media outlets. Rather there were commonalities in more general perceptions of populism that crossed nations, and differences in more specific questions which pointed to the relevance of specific national experiences, situations, and circumstances.

The journalists interviewed identified a number of reasons for the rise of populism. Interestingly, these causes more or less reflect the findings of the scholarly literature (e.g., Guiso, Herrera, Morelli, & Sonno, 2017; Lucassen & Lubbers, 2012; van Hauwaert & van Kessel, 2018). The *demand-side* drivers most often mentioned were real-world, macro-level developments connected to *immigration* and *economic issues*, although they were attributed varying significance in different countries (e.g., financial crisis, influx of refugees). In addition, nationally specific issues were also mentioned, which were often described as being connected to social cohesion (e.g., religion, minorities). This, too, reflects insights from the scholarly debate. Moreover, real-world macro drivers were often seen to work alongside supply-side conditions, such as effectively communicating populist politicians who pick up 'hot' issues and capitalize on powerful emotions such as hope and fear. Interestingly, most journalists did not regard personal characteristics of politicians like charisma to be major reasons for populist success, which stands in contrast at least to some scholarly reflections on populism, but is in line with the arguments put forward in the context of the COST network (e.g., Reinemann, Aalberg, Esser, Strömbäck, & de Vreese, 2017).

In terms of the general effect of the *media* on populist success, perspectives from different countries also varied a lot. While journalists from some countries perceived the media as generally supportive of populist actors and messages (Bosnia, Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey), journalists from other countries saw them as critical (Italy, Portugal, Serbia, Spain, and France). In fact, this also corresponds well to prior theorizing and research (e.g., Esser, Stępińska, & Hopmann, 2017). Media ownership by political actors or strong politics-media ties, a lack of strong journalist standards, and economic motives (small media markets) were mentioned most often as reasons for media support of populism (Esser et al., 2017). In addition, in countries with tabloid/popular media outlets, these were generally identified as a force promoting populism, although not all scholarly studies seem to support this in such clarity (see the chapter by Blassnig et al.).

The cross-national investigation of how *politicians* in 11 countries view populism and the role of the media also made it clear that national contexts matter (see the empirical chapter by Salgado et al.). As with the journalists, the interviews did not reveal clearly discernible regional patterns and there were divergent views on the media's role in spreading or containing populism. Greater consensus was apparent, however, regarding the general perception of populism as a negative development with potentially harmful consequences for European democracies. And this also was true for the issues that were seen as promoting populist success in Europe, namely, immigration and economic hardship. Only some referred to populism as a force that could strengthen democracies by fostering political inclusion of alienated parts of the electorate and boosting political engagement. This, however, should not come as a surprise, as most of the politicians interviewed were political opponents and competitors of populist parties.

Interestingly, when asked for the reasons for populist success, politicians were rather self-reflective and mainly pointed to the malfunctioning of established democratic institutions, including mainstream political parties, in addressing problems and producing convincing discourses and solutions. In contrast to that, politicians, like the journalists interviewed, did *not* see a strong contribution of individual personalities and charisma as a driving force for the attractiveness and success of populism, which stands in contrast to parts of the literature (see Reinemann et al., 2017 for a discussion). In fact, politicians were likely to see social developments and deficits on the part of the established political institutions to be more important.

With respect to the role of the media, both mainstream news and social media, politicians generally agreed that they are an important part of the equation to explain populist success. In contrast, politicians in some countries suggested that the news media were regularly instrumentalized by their populist governments. On the other hand, media competition and commercialization were mentioned as driving factors that contribute to a tabloidization of news-making, which was seen as enhancing the chances of populist messages and actors being covered. This, again, is very much in line with the arguments put forward in the literature on the interplay between populism and the politicized or commercialized media (see also Part II of this volume). Moreover, politicians regard social media as conducive to populist success because of the opportunities they provide for populists in particular to bypass the traditional news media, which is, again, quite similar to the arguments put forward in the scholarly debate (e.g., Engesser, Fawzi, & Larsson, 2017).

Politicians and journalists thus share the analysis of immigration and economic hardship as factors fostering populism and when these are salient, individually or in combination with each other, they are conducive to populist success. They also agree in that they do not see strong regional

patterns, i.e., they did not refer to consistent patterns in, for example, Southern or Eastern Europe. Rather they see either overarching international trends or national-level factors as more important in explaining populist success and the role of the media. Interestingly, politicians and journalists seem to differ somewhat in their interpretation of the role of the media. Politicians tend to consider the media as central actors and also part of explaining populist success, while journalists tend to *not* see the media as playing a significant role in the rise of populism. This difference squares well with several studies comparing perceptions of journalists and politicians of the role of the media in democratic processes (e.g., Vliegenthart & Skovsgaard, 2017; but also see Fawzi, 2018a). In connection to populism, these differences may also be indicative of a problematic unwillingness of journalists to accept the fact that they may unwittingly support populist agendas and rhetoric by, for example, promoting certain issues or applying certain frames. We will get back to this point below.

Populism in Media Coverage: Contextual and Organizational Drivers

The book also reports the findings of a cross-national content analysis of a variety of print news media in 12 European countries. Focusing on immigration coverage and opinion pieces, the chapters give a comprehensive overview of where populist messages are most common and who are their sources (see the chapter by Blassnig et al.). In addition, they identify important drivers of the presence of these populist elements on the macro, meso-, and story level (see the chapters by Maurer et al. and Esser et al.).

In line with the results from the interviews with politicians and journalists, the chapter by Blassnig et al. concludes that there obviously are important national peculiarities with regard to populist messages in the media. For example, in line with prior theorizing, results suggest that ‘the people’ and respective out-groups are defined somewhat differently in different countries. For instance, in some countries, the media convey a more cultural or religious notion of ‘the people’ and ‘the others’ (e.g., Poland, Israel, Bulgaria). In addition, although anti-elitism was the most common dimension of populism in media coverage, countries differed in which elites were the most frequently criticized (e.g., national, supranational, or the media elite). Moreover, the relative presence of the in- vs. outgroup-oriented dimensions of populism varied, too. In contrast to that, a *common* feature of coverage across most countries was that higher levels of people-centrist messages usually went along with higher levels of exclusionary messages. This suggests that media coverage typically contributes to perceptions of an antagonism between in- and out-groups once people-centrist or exclusionary messages become more frequent in the news. This finding supports the interviewed politicians’ perception that the mass media do initiate the dissemination of populist ideas.

Moreover, the analyses by Blassnig et al. show that there is considerable cross-country variance in the presence of individual dimensions of populism as well as different patterns of how those dimensions stand in relation to one another. This highlights the importance of the chapter by Maurer et al., which takes a closer look at several macro- and meso-level factors that might encourage, or dampen, the presence of populist elements in media coverage. Regarding macro-level factors, their analyses show significant relationships between the role perceptions journalists typically hold in a country and the degree of populism in its newspapers. In countries where journalists emphasize an educational role, degrees of populism tend to be lower, suggesting that journalists may have the aim to shield their audiences from populist messages. The opposite holds true for countries in which journalists typically lean towards more supportive or adversarial role conceptions. Where journalists perceive themselves as facilitators of governments (*supportive role*), regular news coverage includes more populist messages, indicating a greater extent of populism *through* the media. Where journalistic culture is more adversarial there also is more (*anti-elite*) populism, especially in editorials and commentaries. This suggests a greater degree of populism *by* the media in these contexts, i.e., the media taking a more political role themselves (e.g., Hanitzsch, 2007; Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018).

Regarding meso-level, organizational factors, Maurer et al. do not find evidence that tabloid newspapers per se tend to include more populist messages. This is in line with some prior studies but stands in contrast to others (Wettstein, Esser, Schulz, Wirz, & Wirth, 2018). In the data analyzed here, the mass-market orientation of media organizations *in itself* did not generally foster populist messaging. The authors conclude that it rather is the preference for a news logic that emphasizes political conflict and emotional cues, which creates favorable conditions for populist content. Clearly, more research is needed to disentangle the interactions between populists and tabloid/commercial media as well as the country-specific factors that seem to have a crucial impact on the exact functioning of this relationship and the part played by tabloid media.

In contrast to the previous chapters, the analyses by Esser et al. applied a dynamic perspective and compared the presence of populist message elements in newspaper coverage in 2016 and 2017. The primary goal of this analysis across time was to investigate the relationship between certain macro-level situational factors (i.e., migration, political activities, audience perceptions of issues) and changes in the degree of populism as reflected in news coverage. Again, results suggest a high degree of country-specificity and the authors conclude that intra-media factors seem to be the most important explanatory factors for the *changes* of populist reporting between 2016 and 2017. However, there also is at least some indication that contextual and situational factors also affected populism in news coverage, although different factors were influential in different national

contexts. For example, the degree of populism in the news was obviously connected to the actual development of migration in some countries (e.g., Germany and Greece; *event-driven*) while in others it seemed to be more *politics-driven* (e.g., Bulgaria, Poland). In contrast to that, there was no evidence for a strong effect of the public agenda, which would have been indicative of *audience-driven* news.

Effects of Populist Communication: Identity, Deprivation, and the Blame Game

Turning to the effects of populist communication, the theoretical chapter by Hameleers et al. provides a conceptual framework and then the methodological chapter by Hameleers, Andreadis, and Reinemann lays out the design of a cross-national experiment. The conceptual chapter integrates research on selective exposure, motivated reasoning, social identity, cognitive priming, stereotyping, and blame attribution. It argues that the effects of populist communication are the result of the combination of crisis and group-related rhetoric. As a result, populist messaging entails cognitive (perceptions of crisis and deprivation), emotional (fear, in-group attachment, out-group anger), attitudinal (images of in- and out-groups), and sometimes behavioral consequences (engagement, voting). Remarkably, populist communication does not need to change attitudes, because it works by priming and trait activation only. However, not everybody will be attracted to populist messaging under any kind of real-world circumstances. Instead, its effects are conceptualized as individually differential and context-dependent. Following this theoretical outline, the following chapters investigated effects of populist messaging using a large-scale experiment conducted in 15 European countries. In the experiment, respondents were shown different versions of a crisis story. The versions only differed in which groups were blamed for the future economic downfall described in the story, reflecting various kinds of empty left-wing and right-wing populism.

Corbu et al. investigated *cognitive effects* of the stories on blame attributions and stereotyping. These were rather weak in general, which should come as no surprise given that respondents were presented just one article that was supposed to make a difference. However, the analysis was able to show that left-wing anti-outgroup cues blaming ‘the rich’ and economic elites were most influential, that the impact of anti-immigrant cues was much weaker, and that both anti-politics and people-centrism cues made almost no difference. The reasons for these differential effects seem to be complex. For the effects of the left-wing out-group cues, the fit of the specific issue (economy) and the blamed out-group (‘the rich’) was probably crucial, whereas blaming immigrants might not be regarded especially credible in the economic context of the story. This may have contributed to the finding that anti-immigrant cues did *not* increase immigrant

blaming in most countries—and even backfired in some contexts (e.g., Sweden).

In contrast to that, the limited effects of anti-politics cues are most likely the result of a *ceiling effect*: because blaming politicians was so common and their image so negative across countries, the chances of significant *additional* negative effects were rather small. And, finally, the fact that people-centrism cues were not influential by themselves might be traced back to the fact that negative appeals (blame) are generally more persuasive. Although these explanations need further investigation, the results more broadly suggest that blaming strategies need to fit the thematic issue context in which they are used, because citizens seem to see through overly transparent attempts to blame groups that can hardly seriously be called out as responsible.

With respect to the impact of contextual factors, the analyses by Corbu et al. again support the notion that the exact functioning of populist communication seem to be rather country-specific. In addition, although the idea of regional differences may seem appealing at first sight, the data do not suggest that regional differences are clear-cut or even important. This supports both findings from the interviews with journalists and politicians, as well as results of the content analysis presented in Parts I and II of this volume.

Finally, Andreadis et al. investigated effects of populist cues on populist attitudes and voting intentions. Generally, effects were again rather small. But given that this effect can be expected to be conditional on individual characteristics and national contexts, it is rather striking that a single stimulus had any impact at all. Against this background, the effects that Andreadis et al. find of people-centrism, anti-immigrant, and left-wing anti-outgroup cues ('the rich') on people-centrism and anti-wealthy attitudes, respectively, should neither be over-interpreted nor completely neglected. Again, results were very country-specific with almost no clear regional trends apparent. In some countries, none of the populist cues had any impact on the different dimensions of populist attitudes (i.e., Norway, Sweden, France, Austria, and Israel) while in others there were specific cues that resonated with the audience. For example, people-centrism cues boosted people homogeneity attitudes in Italy and Spain, left-wing anti-outgroup cues negatively affected attitudes toward the wealthy in Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, and the UK, and right-wing anti-out-group cues activated anti-immigrant attitudes in Italy and Greece.

As far as voting intentions are concerned, at least one of the cues had an effect on populist voting in five of the 15 countries (Greece, Norway, Romania, Sweden, and Switzerland). Remarkably, although the anti-immigrant cue did not produce strong cognitive effects in the analysis by Corbu et al., it had the strongest impact on voting for right-wing populist parties in Norway. In addition, effects were found of anti-elite cues on left-wing populist voting (Switzerland); of people-centrism cues

on left-wing (Romania) and right-wing populist voting (Sweden); and of anti-wealthy cues on right-wing populist voting (Greece, Romania). This shows that, depending on the national contexts, the same kinds of populist cues might benefit different kinds of populist parties. This is in line with recent research (e.g., Rooduijn & Burgoon, 2018).

General Conclusion From the Empirical Studies

In sum, there are no simple and across-the-board conclusions about the workings of populist communication across Europe. This is an important antidote to the pervasive naïve, universalist narrative about populism (see also de Vreese, Esser, Aalberg, Reinemann, & Stanyer, 2018). Although economic issues and the societal and political discussion about immigration and integration can generally be regarded as conducive to populist success, the dynamics and patterns of populist communication and how it is covered and perceived still seem to be strongly affected by national contexts. For example, although the cross-national analysis of news coverage points to the fact that the most important role of the media generally is to provide a platform for populists, some media seem to take a more active and political approach, probably crossing the line and becoming populist actors at times.

The book also highlights that media effects on citizens can be found, but that these appear to be contingent on whether certain messages are repeated (which they were not in our experimental design), whether or not certain predispositions are already strongly held (such as in our case where ceiling effects kicked in), and whether or not the effects are expected across the board or only for some citizens and in some regions or contexts. Perhaps it is encouraging to see that citizens are not swayed massively in their responses to a single stimulus material.

Implications

Based on the book's findings, the state-of-the-art literature, and ongoing public and academic discussions about the responses to populism by politicians, journalists, and citizens, we want to offer some guidance in this final section to everybody faced with today's populist political communication. We realize that advice already exists in the public domain, but we provide it from the perspective of the countries covered here, mostly European democracies, and acknowledge that giving advice often means overlooking some national nuances. For example, reactions to populism in countries where populist parties are in government, have privileged access to public service media, or even have their own media organizations may well be different from reactions in countries where populist parties are rather small and put a stronger focus on bypassing traditional

news media via online channels. In addition, reactions to populist parties will also depend on whether they share basic democratic values or whether they (at least partially) cross the line to authoritarian or even extremist positions (e.g., Abts & Rummens, 2007). We nevertheless feel compelled to extrapolate the following lessons from extant research and the findings of this book.

*Journalists and the Media*¹

Reflect on Your Role and Be Transparent About It

The results of the content analysis have shown that there seems to be a connection between journalistic role conceptions and how populism is reflected in the news. In fact, various discussions with journalists also seem to indicate that the great uncertainty about how to deal with populists often is related to a more general insecurity about journalism's role in a liberal democracy under pressure. Therefore, a necessary step for journalists and media organizations is to reflect on their values and their role in democracy. Are they more or less passive conveyors of information? Is there a point where they feel compelled to explicitly defend democratic values or warn against certain actors? What will be the result of the position we take and the coverage we base on these decisions? These are important questions that media organizations need to answer for themselves, and that they need to be transparent about vis-à-vis their audiences.

Use the Same Standards for Populists and Non-Populists

Representatives and voters of populist parties are especially critical of the established news media (e.g., Fawzi, 2018b; Schulz, Wirth, & Müller, 2018). Neglecting, isolating, or judging populist parties by different standards might therefore strengthen anti-media sentiments and even contribute to their political success. Belgium's Vlaams Blok party is a case in point. The party was neglected by political opponents and the media, and it gained popularity in the wake of criticism of the established parties and elite media (Coffé, Heyndels, & Vermeir, 2007). Journalists should therefore cover populist actors based on the same standards they use for other political actors.

Call Out Populists When Democratic Norms Are Violated

Although this may to a certain degree depend on the role conception journalists identify with, we are convinced that journalists generally need to call out populists on norm violations and give voice to critics when

foundations of liberal democracy (e.g., separation of powers, rule of law, religious freedom, minority rights, freedom of speech and the press) are challenged—or when populist parties (or parts of them) cross the line toward extremism. Indeed, calling populists out in these cases can be an effective tool to reduce their legitimacy among potential voters (van Spanje, 2018). As aptly put by Michael Schudson (1995, p. 217), this represents more than just accountability to the voters: ‘The press can serve as a stand-in for the public, holding governors accountable—not to the public (which is not terribly interested), but to the ideas and rules of the democratic polity’.

Fact-Check and Correct

One of the keys to populist success is its ability to cultivate the perception that crisis and decline are imminent and that certain groups are to blame. If the real-world situation does not justify this portrayal, populists may make use of misinformation, disinformation, and misleading characterizations of reality. In fact, there is some indication even beyond Donald Trump that populist actors may be especially tempted to use misinformation and fall victim to argumentative fallacies (Bergmann, 2018; Blassnig, Büchel, Ernst, & Engesser, 2018). Because of that it is important to be aware of the results of research on corrections, which indicates that although ‘backfire effects’ may happen, especially among strong partisans, corrections do generally reduce misperceptions (e.g., Chan, Jones, Hall Jamieson, & Albarracín, 2017; Walter & Murphy, 2018). This makes fact-checking and correction important tools when scrutinizing the foundations of populist blaming and issue positions. Corrections of populist-originated misinformation and disinformation then should be done in a matter-of-fact way, ideally provide substantial explanations, and use sources that are close to populist positions ideologically. This suggestion also refers to cases in which populists present themselves as representing ‘the will of the majority’. Journalists should check those claims, too, and be aware of ‘false equivalence’ where some viewpoints held by de facto minorities end up getting as much media attention as de facto majorities and appear to represent ‘the will of the people’.

Ask for Details, Foundations, and Consequences

When covering populist actors, like any political actors, attention to the details, foundations, and consequences of (policy) proposals is imperative. The watchdog function and scrutiny should apply to all (see above). Insisting on explanation and justification can be daunting, but it is the only way to discover whether populist proposals are realistic or adequate, what kind of values and ideas they are based on, whether their portrayal

of reality and the blame they attribute is justified, and what consequences their proposals would entail.

*Beware of Populism Through the Media and Do Not
Fall for Their Strategies of Provocation*

Although often critical, populists, too, have an interest in getting their message across in the news media. Sometimes they exploit journalists and media logic by using tactics of provocation, taboo breaking, and strategic ambiguity to change and dominate the media agenda or change it to their advantage (e.g., Gutsche, 2018; Krämer, 2018). Although messaging by elite actors or political parties is potentially newsworthy, journalists have to be aware of the fact that they might inadvertently become a crucial part of party communication and success if they only adhere to a passive role conception and fall for every outrageous statement or unimportant proposal. Journalists should have in mind that sometimes statements may be deliberately designed to cause outrage and therefore may also want to try to explicitly de-mask this strategy and the motives behind it.

Beware of Populism by the Media

Research has shown that populist actors—like other political actors—may not only benefit from coverage of themselves, but also from coverage of the issues they ‘own’ as well as overly critical coverage of established parties and the established political system (e.g., Wirz et al., 2018). We can assume that this is especially true when media coverage becomes *media populism*, i.e., when the media use the same crisis narratives, people-centrism, and blame frames, the same overly generalizing ‘us vs. them’, anti-elite, and anti-outgroup perspectives that are characteristic of populist communication (e.g., Krämer, 2014; Esser et al., 2017). Use of these kinds of frames may (unwillingly) contribute to populist politicians’ success without even mentioning populist actors at all.

Be Aware of Bypassing and Digital Tribalism

In the coverage of politics in general and populists in particular, there should be an awareness that audiences might get an increasing share of their information from political actors directly (Engesser et al., 2017). In addition, audience worldviews might increasingly be affected by (online) sources which may not care about journalistic standards or the truth, but for whom allegiance to their (digital) ‘tribe’ is key. If established media do not take these alternative sources seriously, an increasing gap may appear between the world that is presented in alternative and established sources, which may in the long-term damage the credibility of all information and journalistic media in particular.

Citizens

Use news! There is a growing divide in today's high-choice media landscape between citizens that consume news and those who do not (e.g., Hopmann, Wonneberger, Shehata, & Jonas, 2016; Strömbäck, Djerf-Pierre, & Shehata, 2013). News media consumption is unequivocally related to political knowledge, political interest, and political efficacy, all hallmarks of an engaged citizenry. In high-choice media democracies, there is abundant choice, but also a responsibility to be informed. Ignorance is no excuse.

Be Willing to Pay for News

Public information, news, and current affairs analyses are not only foundational elements of a healthy democracy, they are also commodities, and their producers are in search of viable funding models (e.g., Reuters, 2018). Quality news is costly and requires citizens paying directly through subscriptions or indirectly through taxes or license fees. A strong, independent, autonomous public broadcaster also correlates with political knowledge and interest (Fraile & Iyengar, 2014). But it does not come for free. Therefore, it should be self-evident for citizens to be willing to pay their share for upholding institutions that are providing journalism in the public interest.

Be Cognizant of Your Perceptual Screens, Filter-Bubbles, and Echo Chambers

In a high-choice information environment there is a greater need for citizens to become aware of the information diet they select and the information diet that is automatically selected for them (through algorithms and digital behavioral traces). Citizens should be aware of the fact that their own media behavior and algorithms might put them in an echo chamber and disconnect them from other people in society—even though it is still disputed how widespread and dangerous this phenomenon may actually be (e.g., Möller, Trilling, Helberger, & van Es, 2018; Zuiderveen Borgesius et al., 2017). Likewise, citizens should be aware that their predispositions, political preferences, and perceptual biases impact on the way they interpret new information. It is important in increasingly fragmented political and media environments to assess substance and merits of information and arguments and not accept them because they confirm pre-existing individual or tribal beliefs.

Communicate Responsibly Yourself

In today's environment, the ability to express yourself and share and like information has two important consequences: such behavior is an

important part of citizens' public life, their self-presentation, and how their network becomes informed. Not all citizens consume and share public information like news in the same way (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). In addition, the way citizens deal with news and information, particularly online, is also feeding directly into an environment where clicks, shares, and likes might (indirectly) affect subsequent news supply. In analogy to environmental behavior, citizens also have a responsibility to consider their potential information pollution and 'informational footprint'. This means, for example, to use credible news sources, become media literate, and refrain from spreading false and misleading information.

Politicians

Stand Your Ground: Avoid Expedient Policy Shifts

The literature has pointed to several consequences of the success of populist and radical right-wing parties. A recent study convincingly demonstrates that one of the biggest impacts of populist parties is to move the policy positions of mainstream parties (see Abou-Chadi & Krause, 2018). These authors show that both mainstream left and mainstream right parties move their own policy positions in response to the success of right-wing populist parties. This highlights the need for parties to be cognizant of their own moves, since not only citizens respond to these parties, but so do mainstream parties. They should be aware of the fact that rhetorical convergence and policy shifts towards populists may not have the consequences they anticipate but rather benefit them by lending credibility and legitimacy to their claims (but see van Spanje & de Graaf, 2018).

Do Not Attack the Free Media

Attacking and discrediting the institution of the free press is a common denominator of populist political actors. But even if many mainstream politicians are distrustful of the media, too, and find that journalists intervene and interpret too much what goes on in politics (Brants, de Vreese, Möller, & van Praag, 2010), attacking free media only yields short-term gains. A healthy democracy is dependent upon a free press. Moreover, trust in the media and trust in politics go hand in hand. If politicians undermine public trust in the media, this will backfire on trust in their own institutions (Hanitzsch, van Dalen, & Steindl, 2017; Fawzi, 2018b). Politicians should therefore stand out for supporting rather than undermining this core institution of liberal democracies. There is an important difference between warranted criticism and attempts to systematically undermine the credibility of the media.

Be Cautious About Claiming to Represent the Will of the People

At the core of representative politics is the legitimacy of the elected. It is therefore not novel in politics that politicians articulate and appeal to the voters and ‘the people’. However, politicians are well advised to be specific about who they represent, and on the basis of what? Votes, polls, gut feelings? Politicians should be cognizant of the limits of certain polls and social media utterances as reflecting public opinion or the will of the people. Moreover, they should be careful when interpreting a poll conducted in the absence of a public debate. Polls without a public debate may look like public opinion and the will of the people but are often not. Moreover, caution is warranted by politicians: A key feature of modern societies is their pluralism and diversity. Creating the impression that there is one homogeneous, common will of ‘the people’ that can easily be understood and represented implies neglecting this de facto diversity of interests and opinions.

Do Not Avoid the Debate

When new political entrepreneurs and parties enter and alter existing party competition, established (mainstream) parties are, de facto, forced to respond. Excluding, neglecting, or ostracizing new political actors and parties is generally not a good idea (van Spanje, 2017). So at least as long as parties do not cross the line to extremism, engage and embrace them as part of the political system and arena, argue back, resist the temptation to exaggerate, and de-mask overly simplistic arguments. As a crisis narrative is the very basis of populist communication, questioning the diagnosis in the first place can be crucial. Are things really as bad as they seem? And even if they are, the values and mindset behind policy proposals as well as their likely consequences may still be debated. In doing so, be considerate of terms and frames used. Consider whether an argument is best thought of using your opponent’s or your own terminology.

Acknowledge the Emotional Citizen And Citizens’ Emotions

It is well known that emotionalized blame attributions influence the perception of blame and citizens’ populist attitudes (Hameleers, Bos, & de Vreese, 2017). While such use of emotional language might thus be an advantage overall, the appeal of emotions has an additional component. The raised and sustained success of populism hinges on perceptions of economic hardship and immigration. Politicians must therefore not only address the ‘rational citizen’, but recognize that politics is also about emotions. Acknowledging citizens’ emotions, such as fear and feelings of deprivation, and understanding and helping to address these concerns

rather than condemning their relevance are important response strategies for politicians.

* * *

With this book we have attempted to push the agenda on populist political communication. The academic research agenda we presented here is comparative in nature. Elsewhere (de Vreese et al., 2018, p. 424) we have argued that ‘only comparative analysis can reveal and explain similarities and differences in the communicative aspects of populism across countries’. Furthermore, we believe that future research must broaden the scope of what is considered media. In this book we showcased the platform function, but the media ecology is changing, with new actors and players in the field. These actors, including major social media platforms, should be central in further analyses. But they should not be looked at in isolation, but rather as part of a larger information system, in which social media and their users interact with traditional news media and political actors in ever faster news cycles. At the same time, we still know too little about key features of social media communication in the context of populism when it comes to, for example, visuals, patterns of sharing and liking, the relevance of bots and trolls, or the extent of personalization and disinformation (de Vreese et al., 2018).

Finally, we encourage scholars to not only look at the effects of news and information. Many citizens have a preference for other formats or genres altogether (Prior, 2007). It seems relevant to expand the scope to, for example, the role of satire and political entertainment more broadly (Boukes et al., 2015). There is some evidence to suggest that satirical formats can exacerbate confirmation biases, such that satirical information options lead to less counter-attitudinal exposure (compared to hard news), thus potentially reinforcing opinions and leading to further polarization (Stroud & Muddiman, 2013). How such processes affect selection and effects vis-à-vis populism remains an open question.

In closing, we stress again that this is not an academic endeavor alone. The topic of our research touches the very foundations of liberal democracies and all actors—whether politicians, individual journalists, media organizations, or citizens—need to be aware of and act on the basis of what we know about populist communication. At the end of the day, the quality of democracy is in great part a function of the quality of this communication and the interaction between different actors and groups.

Note

1. Some of the recommendations to journalists/media have already been discussed in de Vreese (2017).

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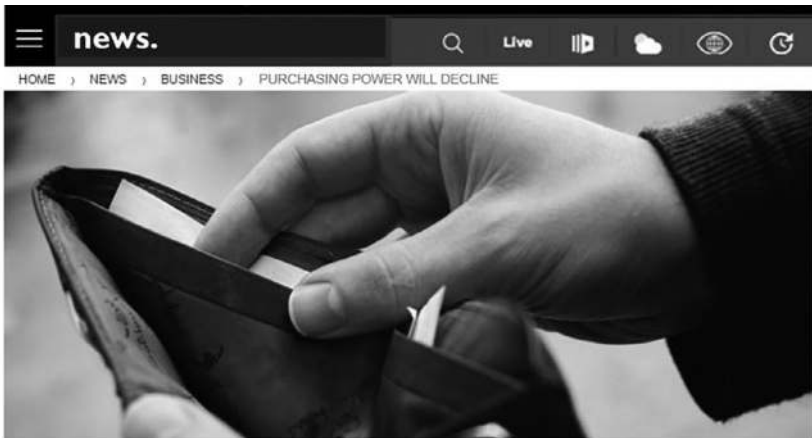
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Appendix A

Comparative Experiment

Stimuli for All Eight Conditions

(1) People-centrist/empty populism



Economy

Purchasing power of [nationals] will decline – foundation *FutureNow* releases new report

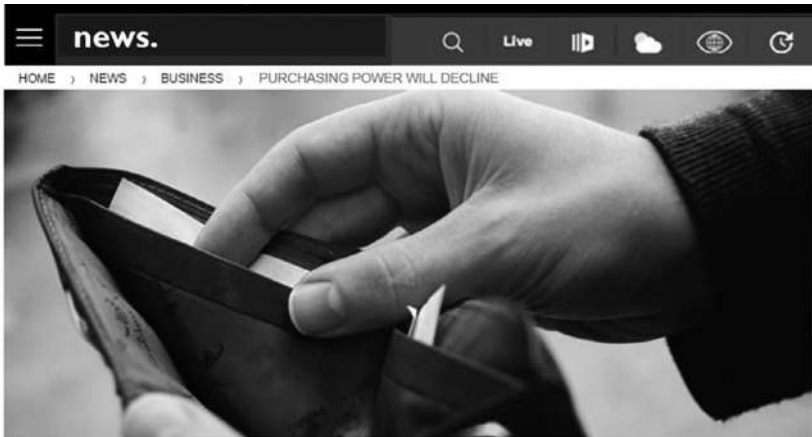


According to a new report by *FutureNow* purchasing power in [country] will decline in the coming years. A spokesperson for the independent foundation that has been monitoring economic developments for years comments on the report:

“The common citizens in [country] need to be made aware of the fact that they will have less money to spend. So many people in [country] are working so hard everyday to have a good life. There is something profoundly wrong when these efforts do not pay off. Action has to be taken now to address this threat to the well-being of our people.”

Read more...

(2) Anti-political elite populism



Economy

Purchasing power will decline for [nationals] – foundation *FutureNow* blames politicians in new report

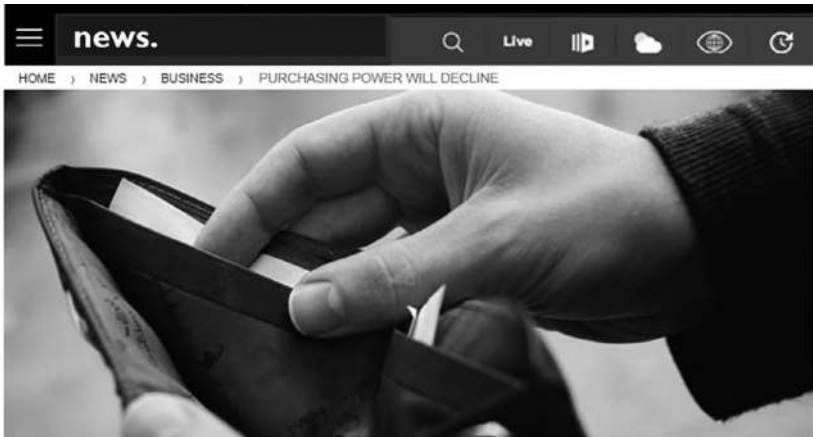


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“The common citizens in [country] need to be made aware of the fact that they will have less money to spend. So many people in [country] are working so hard everyday to have a good life. There is something profoundly wrong when these efforts do not pay off. It is obvious that politicians are to blame. They have been too short-sighted, self-serving, and corrupt in recent years. They don’t care about anyone but themselves and are too detached from the people. Action has to be taken now to address this threat to the well-being of our people.”

Read more...

(3) Right-wing exclusionist populism



Economy

Purchasing power will decline for [nationals] – foundation *FutureNow* blames immigrants in new report

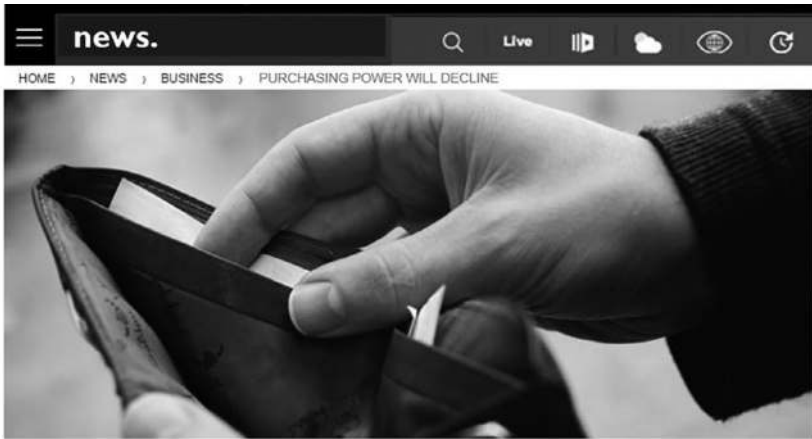


According to a new report by *FutureNow* purchasing power in [country] will decline in the coming years. A spokesperson for the independent foundation that has been monitoring economic developments for years comments on the report:

“The common citizens in [country] need to be made aware of the fact that they will have less money to spend. So many people in [country] are working so hard everyday to have a good life. There is something profoundly wrong when these efforts do not pay off. It is obvious that immigrants are to blame. They are too demanding, they exploit our system and are hard to integrate. Action has to be taken now to address this threat to the well-being of our people.”

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(4) Right-wing complete populism



Economy

Purchasing power will decline for [nationals] – foundation *FutureNow* blames politicians and immigrants in new report

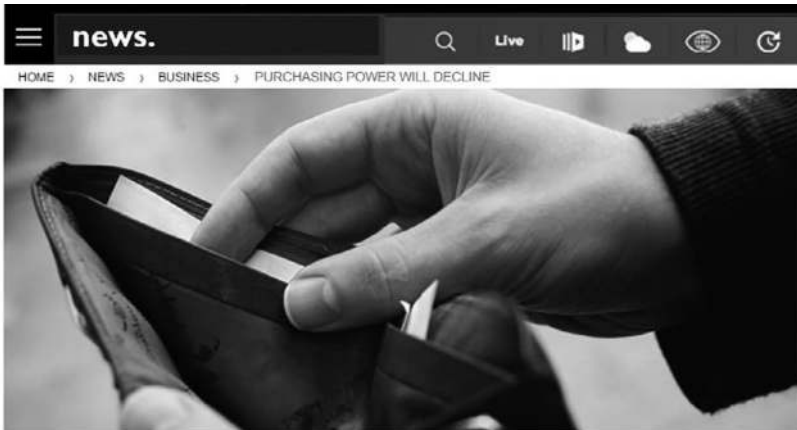


According to a new report by *FutureNow* purchasing power in [country] will decline in the coming years. A spokesperson for the independent foundation that has been monitoring economic developments for years comments on the report:

“The common citizens in [country] need to be made aware of the fact that they will have less money to spend. So many people in [country] are working so hard everyday to have a good life. There is something profoundly wrong when these efforts do not pay off. It is obvious that politicians and migrants are to blame. Politicians have been too short-sighted, self-serving, and corrupt in recent years. Migrants are too demanding, they exploit our system and are hard to integrate. And still, politicians only take care of the migrants instead of our own people. Action has to be taken now to address this threat to the well-being of our people.”

[Read more...](#)

(5) Left-wing exclusionist populism



Economy

Purchasing power will decline for [nationals] – foundation *FutureNow* blames wealthy in new report

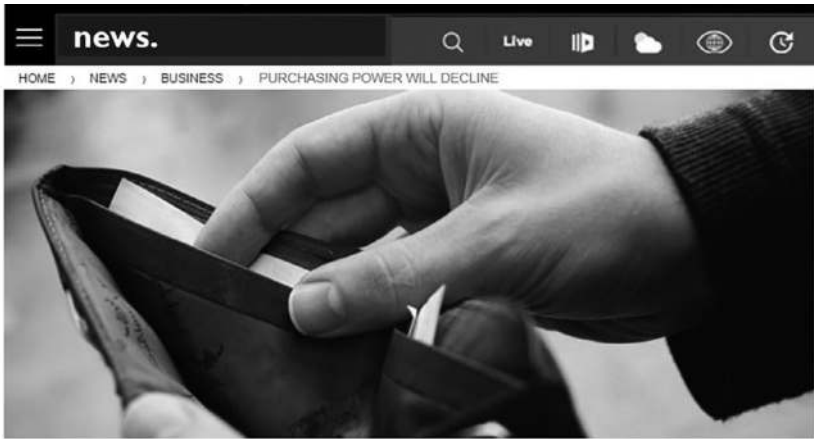


According to a new report by *FutureNow* purchasing power in [country] will decline in the coming years. A spokesperson for the independent foundation that has been monitoring economic developments for years comments on the report:

“The common citizens in [country] need to be made aware of the fact that they will have less money to spend. So many people in [country] are working so hard everyday to have a good life. There is something profoundly wrong when these efforts do not pay off. It is obvious that the super-rich are to blame. They have been too egotistic, self-serving and corrupt in recent years and do not care about anyone but themselves. Action has to be taken now to address this threat to the well-being of our people.”

[Read more...](#)

(6) Left-wing complete populism



Economy

Purchasing power will decline for [nationals] – foundation *FutureNow* blames politicians and the wealthy in new report

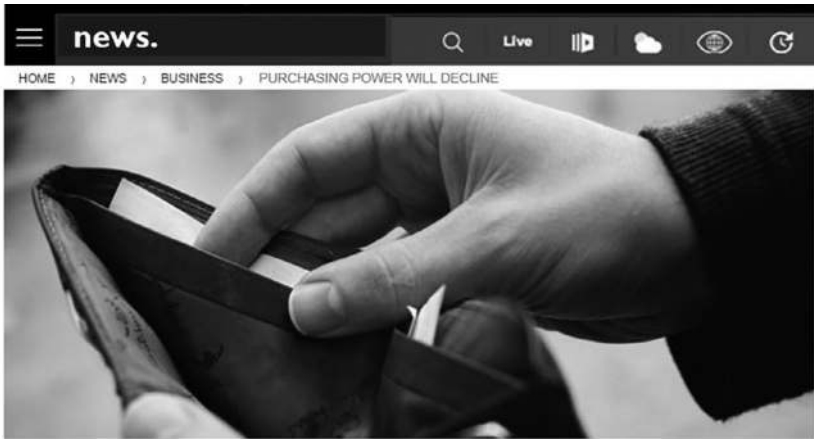


According to a new report by *FutureNow* purchasing power in [country] will decline in the coming years. A spokesperson for the independent foundation that has been monitoring economic developments for years comments on the report:

"The common citizens in [country] need to be made aware of the fact that they will have less money to spend. So many people in [country] are working so hard everyday to have a good life. There is something profoundly wrong when these efforts do not pay off. It is obvious that politicians and the super-rich are to blame. Politicians and the super-rich have been too short-sighted, self-serving, and corrupt in recent years. And still, politicians only take care of the super-rich instead of the common people. Action has to be taken now to address this threat to the well-being of our people."

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(7) Control 1 factual story



Economy

Purchasing power will decline – foundation *FutureNow* releases new report

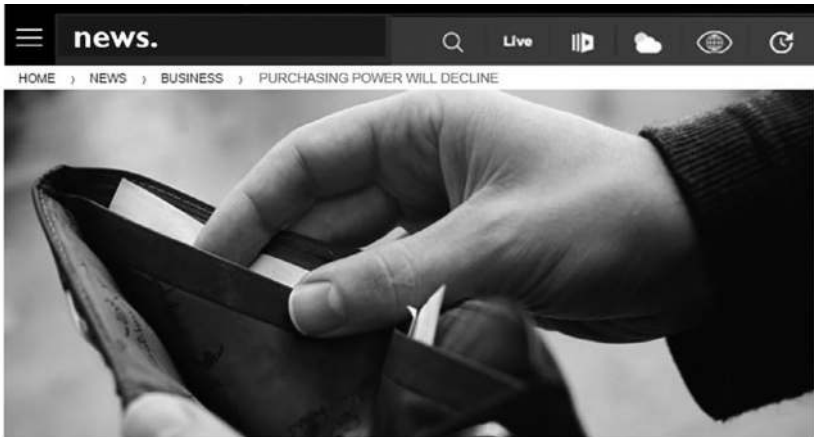


According to a new report by *FutureNow* purchasing power will decline in the coming years. A spokesperson for the independent foundation that has been monitoring economic developments for years comments on the report:

“We have to raise awareness about what this prospect means. There will be less money to spend. Action has to be taken now to address this threat.”

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(8) Control 2 anti-political elite



Economy

Purchasing power will decline – foundation *FutureNow* blames politicians in new report



According to a new report by *FutureNow* purchasing power will decline in the coming years. A spokesperson for the independent foundation that has been monitoring economic developments for years comments on the report:

“We have to raise awareness about what this prospect means for [country]. There will be less money to spend. It is obvious that politicians are to blame. They have been too short-sighted, self-serving, and corrupt in recent years. They don't care about anyone but themselves and are too detached. Action has to be taken now to address this threat.”

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Appendix B

Comparative Experiment

Background Characteristics of Respondents
(Entire Sample vs. Cleaned Sample)

Country	Gender (female)		Age (M, N, SD)		Education (lower, medium, higher)		Political interest (M, N, SD, 1-7-point scale)		Ideology (M, SD, N, 1-10-point scale)	
	Entire sample	Cleaned sample	Entire sample	Cleaned sample	Entire sample	Cleaned sample	Entire sample	Cleaned sample	Entire sample	Cleaned sample
Austria	51.4%	51.3%	M=43.70 N=1,065 SD=13.84	M=43.28 N=1,138 SD=13.94	L=9.5% M=49.0% H=41.5%	L=9.9% M=49.3% H=40.7%	M=4.47 N=1,065 SD=1.74	M=4.44 N=1,135 SD=1.75	M=4.83 N=957 SD=2.26	M=4.83 N=1,016 SD=2.26
France	51.8%	52.1%	M=48.39 N=1,003 SD=16.06	M=48.07 N=1,084 SD=16.04	L=15.1% M=25.5% H=59.4%	L=15.7% M=25.1% H=59.2%	M=4.41 N=1,039 SD=1.79	M=4.32 N=1,191 SD=1.82	M=5.17 N=887 SD=3.01	M=5.20 N=996 SD=3.01
Germany	49.0%	49.5%	M=41.81 N=817 SD=13.09	M=41.02 N=991 SD=13.01	L=30.8% M=36.1% H=33.1%	L=32.1% M=34.1% H=33.8%	M=4.99 N=817 SD=1.56	M=4.94 N=991 SD=1.59	M=4.80 N=739 SD=2.08	M=4.87 N=892 SD=2.12
Greece	30.0%	29.9%	M=45.42 N=1,104 SD=14.97	M=45.46 N=1,116 SD=14.92	L=3.7% M=38.4% H=57.9%	L=3.7% M=38.3% H=58.1%	M=5.66 N=1,098 SD=1.50	M=5.67 N=1,110 SD=1.49	M=4.69 N=1,055 SD=2.54	M=4.68 N=1,067 SD=2.55
Ireland	51.2%	51.6%	M=43.66 N=767 SD=16.18	M=42.13 N=926 SD=15.94	L=9.0% M=51.7% H=39.2%	L=10.4% M=50.4% H=39.2%	M=4.56 N=775 SD=1.70	M=4.54 N=950 SD=1.72	M=5.08 N=652 SD=2.26	M=5.21 N=797 SD=2.34
Israel	51.3%	50.7%	M=42.44 N=908 SD=16.40	M=42.05 N=981 SD=16.40	L=17.4% M=46.4% H=36.2%	L=18.1% M=46.1% H=35.8%	M=4.65 N=918 SD=1.57	M=4.59 N=1,016 SD=1.59	M=5.93 N=900 SD=2.41	M=5.96 N=990 SD=2.44
Italy	51.3%	51.8%	M=50.29 N=846 SD=15.34	M=48.74 N=1,029 SD=15.49	L=13.3% M=72.7% H=14.0%	L=12.2% M=72.5% H=15.3%	M=5.16 N=858 SD=1.54	M=5.11 N=1,054 SD=1.58	M=4.90 N=791 SD=2.80	M=5.04 N=955 SD=2.81

Netherlands	51.5%	51.0%	M=46.39 N=734 SD=13.09	M=45.32 N=881 SD=13.37	L=20.5% M=40.9% H=38.6%	L=21.7% M=40.3% H=37.9%	M=4.56 N=743 SD=1.52	M=4.47 N=934 SD=1.53	M=4.91 N=687 SD=2.49	M=4.92 N=847 SD=2.50	
	Norway	48.0%	50.0%	M=50.31 N=866 SD=15.97	M=49.50 N=1,009 SD=16.11	L=9.1% M=48.0% H=42.8%	L=10.1% M=48.2% H=41.7%	M=4.62 N=866 SD=1.46	M=4.47 N=1,009 SD=1.52	M=5.56 N=793 SD=2.65	M=5.54 N=896 SD=2.64
		Poland	49.5%	48.6%	M=42.33 N=1,093 SD=13.13	M=42.35 N=1,328 SD=12.87	L=31.1% M=31.0% H=38.0%	L=32.9% M=31.1% H=36.0%	M=4.15 N=1,098 SD=1.83	M=4.05 N=1,365 SD=1.85	M=5.18 N=892 SD=2.66
Romania			64.8%	65.9%	M=41.72 N=1,297 SD=13.81	M=41.11 N=1,468 SD=13.76	L=9.0% M=39.6% H=51.3%	L=9.1% M=40.0% H=50.9%	M=3.95 N=1,297 SD=1.83	M=3.87 N=1,468 SD=1.84	M=5.39 N=1,070 SD=2.72
	Spain		49.7%	50.1%	M=49.28 N=936 SD=14.63	M=48.83 N=994 SD=14.69	L=35.6% M=25.5% H=38.9%	L=36.4% M=25.3% H=38.3%	M=4.94 N=945 SD=1.63	M=4.89 N=1,010 SD=1.67	M=4.43 N=897 SD=2.69
		Sweden	46.8%	47.1%	M=50.00 N=1,025 SD=15.19	M=49.95 N=1,045 SD=15.19	L=7.1% M=64.0% H=28.9%	L=7.1% M=63.9% H=29.0%	M=5.27 N=1,030 SD=1.31	M=5.26 N=1,063 SD=1.31	M=4.93 N=1,005 SD=2.49
Switzerland			51.7%	51.9%	M=48.06 N=1,013 SD=17.20	M=47.74 N=1,091 SD=17.17	L=8.2% M=63.1% H=28.7%	L=9.2% M=63.2% H=27.6%	M=4.63 N=1,033 SD=1.66	M=4.58 N=1,133 SD=1.67	M=5.14 N=973 SD=2.26
	United Kingdom		50.3%	50.8%	M=48.89 N=891 SD=15.52	M=48.03 N=1,021 SD=15.50	L=27.0% M=35.4% H=37.6%	L=28.5% M=34.7% H=36.8%	M=4.50 N=910 SD=1.74	M=4.39 N=1,103 SD=1.82	M=5.06 N=762 SD=2.27
		Total	50.04%	50.0%	M=45.43 N=16,102 SD=15.30	M=46.05 N=15,326 SD=15.33	L=17.1% M=43.7% H=39.2%	L=16.1% M=44.1% H=39.8%	M=4.61 N=16,532 SD=1.73	M=4.69 N=14,492 SD=1.70	M=5.09 N=14,698 SD=2.57

Appendix C

Comparative Experiment

Blame Perceptions (Overall Means by Country; 7-Point Scale)

<i>Country</i>		<i>Blaming the people</i>	<i>Blaming politicians</i>	<i>Blaming immigrants</i>	<i>Blaming the wealthy</i>
Austria	Mean	3.82	5.37	3.56	4.32
	N	1065	1065	1065	1065
	SD	1.68	1.48	1.91	1.59
France	Mean	3.73	5.87	4.06	4.74
	N	1036	1034	1032	1038
	SD	1.51	1.32	1.92	1.60
Germany	Mean	3.99	5.34	3.64	4.44
	N	817	817	815	816
	SD	1.62	1.46	1.76	1.59
Greece	Mean	4.29	6.24	2.61	4.58
	N	1095	1093	1072	1075
	SD	1.81	1.17	1.68	1.74
Ireland	Mean	3.87	5.56	3.58	4.73
	N	774	774	774	774
	SD	1.51	1.29	1.69	1.44
Israel	Mean	3.91	5.69	3.26	5.11
	N	918	918	917	917
	SD	1.63	1.35	1.69	1.57
Italy	Mean	3.86	5.53	3.55	4.47
	N	858	857	857	856
	SD	1.57	1.75	1.73	1.61
Netherlands	Mean	3.74	5.33	3.67	4.42
	N	743	743	743	743
	SD	1.45	1.23	1.63	1.57
Norway	Mean	4.06	5.01	3.62	4.21
	N	865	865	865	866
	SD	1.29	1.23	1.66	1.44

<i>Country</i>		<i>Blaming the people</i>	<i>Blaming politicians</i>	<i>Blaming immigrants</i>	<i>Blaming the wealthy</i>
Poland	Mean	4.33	4.77	3.24	4.08
	N	1098	1098	1098	1098
	SD	1.51	1.95	1.67	1.70
Romania	Mean	4.53	5.42	3.39	4.61
	N	1297	1297	1297	1297
	SD	1.82	2.06	1.71	1.89
Spain	Mean	3.68	5.47	3.34	4.78
	N	945	944	945	944
	SD	1.69	1.80	1.65	1.67
Sweden	Mean	3.63	4.22	3.47	3.73
	N	1023	1023	1024	1023
	SD	1.95	1.33	2.00	2.01
Switzerland	Mean	4.34	5.05	3.30	4.55
	N	1032	1034	1033	1034
	SD	1.44	1.29	1.58	1.48
United Kingdom	Mean	3.72	5.42	3.67	4.56
	N	908	908	908	908
	SD	1.42	1.13	1.71	1.45
Total	Mean	3.99	5.35	3.45	4.48
	N	14474	14470	14445	14454
	SD	1.64	1.58	1.77	1.68

Notes: Mean values for blame perceptions by country and group based on scales of 1 (not at all responsible) to 7 (fully responsible).

Appendix D

Comparative Experiment

Stereotypes (Overall Means by Country; 7-Point Scale)

<i>Country</i>		<i>Stereotypes the people</i>	<i>Stereotypes the politicians</i>	<i>Stereotypes the immigrants</i>	<i>Stereotypes the wealthy</i>
Austria	Mean	4.92	3.13	3.38	3.93
	N	1065	1065	1065	1065
	SD	1.09	1.23	1.50	1.13
France	Mean	4.33	2.75	3.66	3.52
	N	1038	1039	1035	1038
	SD	1.30	1.32	1.60	1.35
Germany	Mean	4.80	3.35	3.66	3.86
	N	817	817	817	817
	SD	1.19	1.39	1.44	1.22
Greece	Mean	4.57	2.08	4.14	3.27
	N	1100	1100	1078	1096
	SD	1.04	1.04	1.30	1.16
Ireland	Mean	5.01	3.20	4.35	3.94
	N	775	775	775	775
	SD	1.15	1.54	1.40	1.29
Israel	Mean	4.32	3.11	3.94	3.79
	N	918	918	918	918
	SD	1.14	1.38	1.34	1.26
Italy	Mean	4.15	2.13	3.43	3.25
	N	858	858	858	858
	SD	1.39	1.24	1.42	1.30
Netherlands	Mean	5.04	4.14	4.27	4.18
	N	743	743	743	743
	SD	0.94	1.23	1.38	1.17
Norway	Mean	5.01	3.96	4.14	4.40
	N	866	866	866	866
	SD	0.91	1.27	1.42	1.10

<i>Country</i>		<i>Stereotypes the people</i>	<i>Stereotypes the politicians</i>	<i>Stereotypes the immigrants</i>	<i>Stereotypes the wealthy</i>
Poland	Mean	4.27	2.34	3.43	3.73
	N	1098	1098	1098	1098
	SD	1.32	1.25	1.48	1.31
Romania	Mean	4.40	1.95	3.57	2.61
	N	1297	1297	1297	1297
	SD	1.44	1.18	1.40	1.21
Spain	Mean	4.87	2.50	4.28	3.27
	N	944	945	945	945
	SD	1.32	1.51	1.45	1.42
Sweden	Mean	5.38	4.45	4.99	4.70
	N	1028	1030	1029	1030
	SD	1.01	1.36	1.33	1.25
Switzerland	Mean	5.12	3.89	3.94	4.14
	N	1034	1034	1034	1033
	SD	0.98	1.23	1.31	1.13
United Kingdom	Mean	4.74	3.14	4.33	3.70
	N	910	909	909	909
	SD	1.25	1.42	1.44	1.28
Total	Mean	4.71	3.02	3.95	3.72
	N	14491	14494	14467	14488
	SD	1.24	1.51	1.48	1.35

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